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THE

WORKS

OF

HUGH BLAIR, D.D. F.R.S. ED.

ONE OF

THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH,

AND

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH;

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

THE AUTHOR.

BY JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SERMONS.

London:

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1820.

SPEC
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Blair
v.1

TO THE

QUEEN.

MADAM,

WHEN the First Volume of these Sermons was published, I did not presume to request the liberty of prefixing to them a name so illustrious. Encouraged by the favourable manner in which the Public has received Two Volumes, I now humbly beg leave, on the publication of a Third *, to lay them all before Your MAJESTY.

Had I been in doubt to whom they could be presented with the greatest propriety, the public voice would instantly have directed me to the Person to whom I have now the honour of addressing myself. Discourses intended to promote religion and virtue can be inscribed to none more suitably than to One who, in the highest station of life, has ever supported the cause of religion by her conspicuous regard

* Dr. Blair's Sermons originally formed *Five* Volumes; and this Dedication was prefixed to the Third, which contained Sermons XXXI—L.

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Though the subjects of these Sermons be different from those which I formerly published, some of the same sentiments and expressions may occasionally be found to be repeated in them. This is apt to happen, partly from that similarity of thought and style which will run through all the compositions of an Author who is not copying others, but writing from his own reflections; and partly, from the coincidence of some general topicks and allusions which recur frequently in serious discourses of the practical kind. Where any instances of this nature presented themselves to my memory, I found, that without altering the strain of the Sermon, I could not altogether suppress and omit them; and as it is not often they occur, I did not think it requisite that they should be omitted. If the sentiment, where first introduced, was in any degree useful or important, the renewal of it, when brought forth under some different form, enlarged perhaps, or abridged, or placed in connection with some other topick, may be thought to strengthen and confirm the impression of it. —— With regard to errours or inaccuracies of any other kind, the Author must trust to the indulgence of the candid Reader.

HUGH BLAIR.

A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

DR HUGH BLAIR.

DR. HUGH BLAIR was born in Edinburgh, on the 7th day of April, 1718. His father, John Blair, a respectable merchant in that city, was a descendant of the ancient family of Blair in Ayrshire, and grandson of the famous Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of St. Andrew's, Chaplain to Charles I., and one of the most zealous and distinguished clergymen of the period in which he lived. This worthy man, though firmly attached to the cause of freedom, and to the Presbyterian form of church-government, and though actively engaged in all the measures adopted for their support; yet, by his steady, temperate conduct, commanded the respect even of his opponents. In preference to all the other ecclesiastical leaders of the covenanting party, he was selected by the King himself to fill an office which, from the circumstances of the time, gave frequent access to the Royal Person; "because," said His Majesty, "that man is pious, prudent, "learned, and of a meek and moderate calm temper."—His talents seem to have descended as an inheritance to his posterity. For, of the two sons who survived him, David the eldest, was a clergyman of eminence in Edinburgh, father to Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of Athelstonford, the celebrated author of the poem intitled *The Grave*; and grandfather to

His Majesty's Solicitor-General for Scotland, whose masculine eloquence, and profound knowledge of law, have, in the public estimation, placed him indisputably at the head of the Scottish bar. From his youngest son Hugh, who engaged in business as a merchant, and had the honour to fill a high station in the magistracy of Edinburgh, sprung the learned clergyman, who is the subject of this narrative.

The views of Dr. Blair, from his earliest youth, were turned towards the Church, and his education received a suitable direction. After the usual grammatical course at school, he entered the Humanity Class in the University of Edinburgh, in October 1730, and spent eleven years at that celebrated seminary, assiduously employed in the literary and scientific studies prescribed by the Church of Scotland to all who are to become candidates for her licence to preach the Gospel. During this important period, he was distinguished among his companions both for diligence and proficiency; and obtained from the Professors under whom he studied, repeated testimonies of approbation. One of them deserves to be mentioned particularly, because in his own opinion, it determined the bent of his genius towards polite literature. An essay, Περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ, or, *On the Beautiful*, written by him when a student of logic in the usual course of academical exercises, had the good fortune to attract the notice of Professor Stevenson, and, with circumstances honourable to the author, was appointed to be read in public at the conclusion of the Session. This mark of distinction made a deep impression on his mind; and the essay which merited it, he ever after recollected with partial affection, and preserved to the day of his death as the first earnest of his fame.

At this time Dr. Blair commenced a method of study which contributed much to the accuracy and extent of his knowledge, and which he continued to practise occasionally even after his reputation was fully established. It consisted in making abstracts of the most important works which he read, and in digesting them according to the train of his own thoughts. History, in particular, he resolved to study in this manner; and, in concert with some of his youthful associates,

he constructed a very comprehensive scheme of chronological tables, for receiving into its proper place every important fact that should occur. The scheme devised by this young student for his own private use was afterwards improved, filled up, and given to the public by his learned friend Dr. John Blair, Prebendary of Westminster, in his valuable work, "The "Chronology and History of the World."

In the year 1739, Dr. Blair took his degree of A. M. On that occasion he printed and defended a thesis, *De Fundamentis et Obligatione Legis Naturæ*, which contains a short, but masterly discussion of this important subject, and exhibits, in elegant Latin, an outline of the moral principles, which have been since more fully unfolded and illustrated in his Sermons.

The University of Edinburgh, about this period, numbered among her pupils many young men who were soon to make a distinguished figure in the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the literary history of their country. With most of them Dr. Blair entered into habits of intimate connection, which no future competition or jealousy occurred to interrupt, which held them united through life in their views of public good, and which had the most beneficial influence on their own improvement, on the progress of elegance and taste among their contemporaries, and on the general interests of the community to which they belonged.

On the completion of this academical course, he underwent the customary trials before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and received from that venerable body a licence to preach the Gospel, on the 21st of October 1741. His public life now commenced with very favourable prospects. The reputation which he brought from the University was fully justified by his first appearances in the pulpit; and, in a few months, the fame of his eloquence procured for him a presentation to the parish of Colessie in Fife, where he was ordained to the office of the holy ministry, on the 23d of September 1742. But he was not permitted to remain long in this rural retreat. A vacancy in the second charge of the Canongate of Edinburgh furnished to his friends an opportunity of recalling him to a

station more suited to his talents. And though one of the most popular and eloquent clergymen in the church was placed in competition with him, a great majority of the electors decided in favour of this young orator, and restored him in July 1743 to the bounds of his native city.

In this station Dr. Blair continued eleven years, discharging with great fidelity and success the various duties of the pastoral office. His discourses from the pulpit in particular attracted universal admiration. They were composed with uncommon care; and, occupying a middle place between the dry metaphysical discussion of one class of preachers, and the loose incoherent declamation of another, they blended together, in the happiest manner, the light of argument with the warmth of exhortation, and exhibited captivating specimens of what had hitherto been rarely heard in Scotland, the polished, well compacted, and regular didactic oration.

In consequence of a call from the Town-Council and General Session of Edinburgh, he was translated from the Canongate to Lady Yester's, one of the city churches, on the 11th of October 1754: and on the 15th day of June 1758, he was promoted to the High Church of Edinburgh, the most important ecclesiastical charge in the kingdom. To this charge he was raised at the request of the Lords of Council and Session, and of the other distinguished official characters who have their seats in that church. And the uniform prudence, ability, and success, which, for a period of more than forty years, accompanied all his ministerial labours in that conspicuous and difficult station, sufficiently evince the wisdom of their choice.

Hitherto his attention seems to have been devoted almost exclusively to the attainment of professional excellence, and to the regular discharge of his parochial duties. No production of his pen had yet been given to the world by himself, except two sermons preached on particular occasions, some translations, in verse, of passages of Scripture for the Psalmody of the Church, and a few articles in the Edinburgh Review; a publication begun in 1755, and conducted for a short time by some of the ablest men in the kingdom. But

standing as he now did at the head of his profession, and released by the labour of former years from the drudgery of weekly preparation for the pulpit, he began to think seriously on a plan for teaching to others that art, which had contributed so much to the establishment of his own fame. With this view, he communicated to his friends a scheme of Lectures on composition; and, having obtained the approbation of the University, he began to read them in the College on the 11th of December 1759. To this undertaking he brought all the qualifications requisite for executing it well; and along with them a weight of reputation, which could not fail to give effect to the lessons he should deliver. For, besides the testimony given to his talents by his successive promotions in the Church, the University of St. Andrew's, moved chiefly by the merit of his eloquence, had in June 1757 conferred on him the degree of D. D., a literary honour which, at that time, was very rare in Scotland. Accordingly his first Course of Lectures was well attended, and received with great applause. The patrons of the University, convinced that they would form a valuable addition to the system of education, agreed in the following summer to institute a rhetorical class, under his direction, as a permanent part of their academical establishment; and on the 7th of April 1762, His Majesty was graciously pleased "To erect and endow a Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh, and to appoint Dr. Blair, in consideration of his approved qualifications, Regius Professor thereof, with a Salary of 70l." These Lectures he published in 1783, when he retired from the labours of the office; and the general voice of the Public has pronounced them to be a most judicious, elegant, and comprehensive system of rules for forming the style and cultivating the taste of youth.

About the time in which he was occupied in laying the foundations of this useful institution, he had an opportunity of conferring another important obligation on the literary world, by the part which he acted in rescuing from oblivion the poems of Ossian. It was by the solicitation of Dr. Blair and Mr. John Home that Mr. Macpherson was induced to

publish his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*; and their patronage was of essential service in procuring the subscription which enabled him to undertake his tour through the Highlands for collecting the materials of Fingal, and of those other delightful productions which bear the name of Ossian. To these productions Dr. Blair applied the test of genuine criticism, and soon after their publication gave an estimate of their merits in *a Dissertation* which, for beauty of language, delicacy of taste, and acuteness of critical investigation, has few parallels. It was printed in 1763, and spread the reputation of its author throughout Europe.

The great objects of his literary ambition being now attained, his talents were for many years consecrated solely to the important and peculiar employments of his station. It was not till the year 1777 that he could be induced to favour the world with a volume * of the Sermons which had so long furnished instruction and delight to his own congregation. But this volume being well received, the public approbation encouraged him to proceed: three other volumes † followed at different intervals; and all of them experienced a degree of success of which few publications can boast. They circulated rapidly and widely wherever the English tongue extends; they were soon translated into almost all the languages of Europe; and His present Majesty, with that wise attention to the interests of religion and literature which distinguishes his reign, was graciously pleased to judge them worthy of a public reward. By a royal mandate to the Exchequer of Scotland, dated July 25th, 1780, a pension of 200l. a year was conferred on their author, which continued unaltered till his death.

The motives which gave rise to the present volume ‡ are sufficiently explained by himself in his Address to the Reader.

* Vol. I.	containing Sermons	I—XV.
† Vol. II.		XVI—XXX.
Vol. III.		XXXI—L.
Vol. IV.		LI—LXXI.

‡ This account was originally subjoined to the fifth volume, containing Sermons LXXII—XCI.

The Sermons which it contains were composed at very different periods of his life; but they were all written out anew in his own hand, and in many parts recomposed, during the course of last summer, after he had completed his eighty-second year. They were delivered to the publishers about six weeks before his death, in the form and order in which they now appear. And it may gratify his readers to know that the last of them which he composed, though not the last in the order adopted for publication, was the Sermon on *A Life of Dissipation and Pleasure* — a sermon written with great dignity and eloquence, and which should be regarded as his solemn parting admonition to a class of men, whose conduct is highly important to the community, and whose reformation and virtue he had long laboured most zealously to promote.

The Sermons which he has given to the world are universally admitted to be models in their kind; and they will long remain durable monuments of the piety, the genius, and sound judgment of their author. But they formed only a small part of the discourses he prepared for the pulpit. The remainder, modesty led him to think unfit for the press, and influenced by an excusable solicitude for his reputation, he left behind him an explicit injunction that his numerous manuscripts should be destroyed. The greatness of their number was creditable to his professional character, and exhibited a convincing proof that his fame as a public teacher had been honourably purchased, by the most unwearied application to the private and unseen labours of his office. It rested on the uniform intrinsic excellence of his Discourses, in point of matter and composition, rather than on foreign attractions; for his delivery, though distinct, serious, and impressive, was not remarkably distinguished by that magic charm of voice and action which captivates the senses and imagination, and which, in the estimation of superficial hearers, constitutes the chief merit of a preacher.

In that department of his professional duty, which regarded the government of the church, Dr. Blair was steadily attached to the cause of moderation. From diffidence, and

perhaps from a certain degree of inaptitude for extemporary speaking, he took a less public part in the contests of ecclesiastical politics than some of his contemporaries; and, from the same causes, he never would consent to become Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. But his influence among his brethren was extensive: his opinion, guided by that sound uprightness of judgment which formed the predominant feature of his intellectual character, had been always held in high respect by the friends with whom he acted; and, for many of the last years of his life, it was received by them almost as a law. The great leading principle in which they cordially concurred with him, and which directed all their measures, was to preserve the church, on the one side, from a slavish, corrupting dependence on the civil power; and, on the other, from a greater infusion of democratical influence than is compatible with good order, and the established constitution of the country.

The reputation which he acquired in the discharge of his public duties, was well sustained by the great respectability of his private character. Deriving from family associations a strong sense of clerical decorum, feeling on his heart deep impressions of religious and moral obligation, and guided in his intercourse with the world by the same correct and delicate taste which appeared in his writings, he was eminently distinguished through life by the prudence, purity, and dignified propriety of his conduct. His mind, by constitution and culture, was admirably formed for enjoying happiness. Well balanced in itself by the nice proportion and adjustment of its faculties, it did not incline him to any of those eccentricities, either of opinion or of action, which are too often the lot of genius:—free from all tincture of envy, it delighted cordially in the prosperity and fame of his companions; sensible to the estimation in which he himself was held, it disposed him to dwell at times on the thought of his success with a satisfaction which he did not affect to conceal: inaccessible alike to gloomy and to peevish impressions, it was always master of its own movements, and ready, in an uncommon degree, to take an active and pleasing interest in

every thing, whether important or trifling, that happened to become for the moment the object of his attention. This habit of mind, tempered with the most unsuspecting simplicity, and united to eminent talents and inflexible integrity, while it secured to the last his own relish of life, was wonderfully calculated to endear him to his friends, and to render him an invaluable member of any society to which he belonged. Accordingly there have been few men more universally respected by those who knew him, more sincerely esteemed in the circle of his acquaintance, or more tenderly beloved by those who enjoyed the blessings of his private and domestic connection.

In April 1748, he married his cousin Katharine Bannatine, daughter of the Reverend James Bannatine, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. By her he had a son who died in infancy, and a daughter who lived to her twenty-first year, the pride of her parents, and adorned with all the accomplishments that became her age and sex. Mrs. Blair herself, a woman of great good sense and spirit, was also taken from him a few years before his death, after she had shared with the tenderest affection in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happiness and comfort.

Dr. Blair had been naturally of a feeble constitution of body; but as he grew up, his constitution acquired greater firmness and vigour. Though liable to occasional attacks from some of the sharpest and most painful diseases that afflict the human frame, he enjoyed a general state of good health; and, through habitual cheerfulness, temperance, and care, survived the usual term of human life. — For some years he had felt himself unequal to the fatigue of instructing his very large congregation from the pulpit; and, under the impression which this feeling produced, he has been heard at times to say with a sigh, "that he was left almost the last of "his contemporaries." Yet he continued to the end in the regular discharge of all his other official duties, and particularly in giving advice to the afflicted, who, from different quarters of the kingdom, solicited his correspondence. His last summer was devoted to the preparation of this volume of

Sermons; and, in the course of it, he exhibited a vigour of understanding and capacity of exertion equal to that of his best days. He began the winter, pleased with himself on account of the completion of this work; and his friends were flattered with the hope that he might live to enjoy the accession of emolument and fame which he expected it would bring. But the seeds of a mortal disease were lurking unperceived within him. On the 24th of December 1800, he complained of a pain in his bowels, which, during that and the following day, gave him but little uneasiness; and he received as usual the visits of his friends. On the afternoon of the 26th, the symptoms became violent and alarming: — he felt that he was approaching the end of his appointed course; and retaining to the last moment the full possession of his mental faculties, he expired on the morning of the 27th, with the composure and hope which become a Christian pastor.

The lamentation for his death was universal and deep through the city which he had so long instructed and adorned. Its Magistrates, participating in the general grief, appointed his church to be put in mourning; and his colleague in it, the writer of this Narrative, who had often experienced the inestimable value of his counsel and friendship, delivered on the Sabbath after his funeral a discourse to his congregation, with an extract from which this account shall be closed. It is inserted here at the particular request of that very respectable body of men who composed his Kirk Session, and who, by their public approbation of this tribute to his memory, are desirous of transmitting, with his Sermons, to posterity a memorial of the veneration and esteem with which his conduct had inspired them. — After exhorting to contemplate and follow the patriarchs and saints of former ages, *who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises*, the Preacher thus proceeded:

" In this competition for virtuous attainment, it may be
" often useful to bring down your eye, from contemplating
" the departed worthies of distant times and countries, to-
" wards patterns of imitation that are endeared to you by
" more tender ties. If, in the relations of life, you have

" had a connection, — if, in the circle of your own family, " you have had a father, a husband, or a brother, who dis- " charged with exemplary fidelity the duties of his station, " whom every tongue blessed as the friend of God and man, " and who died as he lived, full of faith and hope, place him " before you as the model of your conduct — conceive him " bending from his seat in the skies, pleased with your at- " tachment, deeply interested in your success, and cheering " you in your labours of love. His image will be as a guardian " angel to admonish you when dangers approach, to rouse " within you every principle of virtuous exertion, and to " inspire you with strength to overcome.

" Our hearts, Christians, have been deeply pierced with " the loss of a most valuable connection, of a venerable " pastor, who watched long for our souls, and with the most " unwearied fidelity pointed out to us the path of happiness. " To you, and to the general interests of pure religion, he " was attached by many powerful obligations. A native of " this city, and descended from a family, which, in former " times, had given several bright ornaments to the Church " of Scotland, he felt the warmest tendencies of nature co- " operating with the principles of duty, to call forth all his " powers in the sacred service to which he was devoted. And " by the blessing of God on his industry, he rose to an emi- " nence in professional merit, which has reflected distin- " guished honour on the city, on the church, and on the " country which produced him.

" It was the fortune of Dr. Blair to appear at a period " when the literature of his country was just beginning to " receive polish and an useful direction; and when it was " emulously cultivated by a bright constellation of young men " who are destined to carry it to high perfection. In concert " with them he applied himself with diligence and assiduity " to all those branches of study which could contribute to " form him for the eloquence of the pulpit. This was the " department in which he chose to excel; to which all th " force of his genius was directed; and in which he soon felt " that his efforts were to be successful. For from the very

" commencement of his theological studies, he gave presages
" of his future attainments; and, in the societies of his youth-
" ful companions, laid the foundations of that splendid re-
" putation, which, through a long life of meritorious service,
" continued to increase; and which has procured for him, as
" a religious instructor, access to the understandings and the
" hearts of all the most cultivated inhabitants of the Christian
" world.

" To you, my brethren, who have long enjoyed the in-
" estimable blessing of his immediate instruction, it will not
" be necessary to describe the qualities of that luminous, fas-
" cinating eloquence with which he was accustomed to warm,
" and ravish, and amend your hearts. You may have heard
" others who equalled, or even excelled him in some of the
" requisites of pulpit oratory, in occasional profoundness of
" thought, in vivid flashes of imagination, or in pathetic
" addresses to the heart. But there never was a public
" teacher in whom all these requisites were combined in juster
" proportions, placed under the direction of a more exquisite
" sense of propriety, and employed with more uniform suc-
" cess to convey useful and practical instruction. Standing
" on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, he ex-
" hibited the doctrines of Christ in their genuine purity, se-
" parated from the dross of superstition, and traced with
" inimitable elegance, through all their beneficial influence
" on the consolation, on the order, and on the virtue of both
" public and private life. Hence his discourses, uniting in
" the most perfect form the attractions of utility and beauty,
" gave a new and better tone to the style of instruction from
" the pulpit; and contributed, in a remarkable degree, to
" correct and refine the religious, the moral, and the literary
" taste of the times in which he lived.

" The universal admiration which attended his ministerial
" labours, was some recompence to him for the exertions
" they had cost. But his chief recompence arose from the
" consciousness of having contributed so eminently to edify
" the Church of Christ, and from the improving influence
" which his labours had shed on his own heart. For he was

" at home and in himself, the perfect image of that meekness, " simplicity, gentleness, and contentment, which his writings " recommend. He was long happy in his domestic relations; " and though doomed at last to feel, through their loss in " succession, the heaviest strokes of affliction, yet his mind, " fortified by religious habits, and buoyed up by his native " tendency to contentment, sustained itself on God, and " enabled him to persevere to the end in the active and " cheerful discharge of the duties of his station; preparing " for the world the blessings of elegant instruction; tender- " ing to the mourner the lessons of divine consolation; guid- " ing the young by his counsels; aiding the meritorious with " his influence, and supporting by his voice and by his con- " duct the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his country.

" With such dispositions and habits it was natural that he " should enjoy a distinguished portion of felicity. And per- " haps there never was a man who experienced more com- " pletely that *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and* " *that all her paths are peace.* His Country was proud of " his merits, and at different times conferred on him, through " the hands of the Sovereign, the most honourable and sub- " stantial proofs of her approbation: foreign lands learned " from him the way of salvation: he saw marks of deference " and respect wherever he appeared: and he felt within him- " self the gratulations of a good conscience, and the hope of " immortality. It was peculiarly delightful to see him in the " latest period of his life, at the venerable age of eighty-two, " looking back on almost three-score years spent in the public " service of his God, pleased with the recollections which it " gave, possessing a mind still vigorous and clear, the delight " of his friends, sensible to the attentions which they paid to " him, burning with zeal for the good of the Church, and, " with all the ardour of youthful ambition, preparing the " materials of a new claim to the gratitude and admiration of " posterity. In this active state of preparation, with the " lamp of life still clear and bright, he was found by the " Great Lord of All when he came to say, 'it is enough;'

" and, after a single night of pain, to call him gently to his
" rest.

" He has gone to give an account of his stewardship.—
" The Church mourns in him the loss of her brightest orna-
" ment. Let us submit to the stroke with resignation and
" reverence; and as the most acceptable proof of respect to
" his memory, let us learn to practise the lessons which he
" taught."

J. FINLAYSON.

EDINBURGH,
March 13th, 1801.

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SERMON

SERMON I.

On the Union of Piety and Morality.

Acts, x. 4.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

THE *High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity dwelleth also with him that is of humble and contrite heart.* In the midst of his glory, the Almighty is not inattentive to the meanest of his subjects. Neither obscurity of station, nor imperfection of knowledge, sinks those below his regard who worship and obey him. Every prayer which they send up from their secret retirements is listened to by him; and every work of charity which they perform, how unknown soever to the world, attracts his notice. The text presents a signal instance of this comfortable truth. In the city of Cæsarea, there dwelt a Roman centurion, a military officer of inferior rank, a Gentile, neither by birth nor religion entitled to the privileges of the Jewish nation. But he was a devout and a benevolent man; who, according to his measure of religious knowledge, studied to perform his duty, *prayed to God always, and gave much*

alms to the people. Such a character passed not unobserved by God. So highly was it honoured, that to this good centurion an Angel was sent from heaven, in order to direct him to the means of full instruction in the truth. The Angel accosts him with this salutation. *Cornelius, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

It is to the conjunction of *prayers and alms* that I purpose now to direct your thoughts, as describing the respectable and amiable character of a man, as forming the honour and the blessedness of a true Christian; piety, joined with charity, faith with good works, devotion with morality. These are things which God hath connected, and which it is impious in man to separate. It is only when they remain united, that they can come up as a grateful *memorial before God.* I shall first endeavour to shew you, That alms without prayers, or prayers without alms, morality without devotion, or devotion without morality, are extremely defective; and then shall point out the happy effects of their mutual union.

Let us begin with considering the case of alms without prayers; that is, of good works without piety, or a proper sense of God and religion. Examples of this are not uncommon in the world. With many, virtue is, or at least is pretended to be, a respectable and an honoured name, while piety sounds meanly in their ears. They are men of the world, and they claim to be men of honour. They rest upon their humanity, their public spirit, their probity, and their truth. They arrogate to themselves all the manly and the active virtues. But devout affections, and religious duties, they treat

with contempt, as founded on shadowy speculations, and fit to employ the attention only of weak and superstitious minds. Now, in opposition to such persons, I contend, that this neglect of piety argues depravity of heart; and that it infers an irregular discharge of the duties of morality.

First, it argues internal depravity; for it discovers a cold and a hard heart. If there be any impression which man is formed by nature to receive, it is a sense of religion. As soon as his mind opens to observation and reflection, he discerns innumerable marks of his dependent state. He finds himself placed by some superiour power, in a vast world, where the wisdom and goodness of the Creator are conspicuous on every side. The magnificence, the beauty and order of nature, excite him to admire and adore. When he looks up to that omnipotent hand which operates throughout the universe, he is impressed with reverence. When he receives blessings which he cannot avoid ascribing to divine goodness, he is prompted to gratitude. The expressions of those affections, under the various forms of religious worship, are no other than native effusions of the human heart. Ignorance may mislead, and superstition may corrupt them; but their origin is derived from sentiments that are essential to man.

Cast your eyes over the whole earth. Explore the most remote quarters of the east or the west. You may discover tribes of men without policy, or laws, or cities, or any of the arts of life: But no where will you find them without some form of religion. In every region you behold the prostrate worshipper, the temple, the altar, and the offering. Wherever

men have existed, they have been sensible that some acknowledgment was due, on their part, to the Sovereign of the world. If in their rudest and most ignorant state, this obligation has been felt, what additional force must it acquire by the improvements of human knowledge, but especially by the great discoveries of the Christian revelation? Whatever, either from reverence or from gratitude, can excite men to the worship of God, is by this revelation placed in such a light, as one should think were sufficient to overawe the most thoughtless, and to melt the most obdurate mind.

Canst thou, then, pretend to be a man of reason, nay a man of virtue, and yet continue regardless of one of the first and chief dictates of human nature? Where is thy sensibility to what is right and fit, if that loud voice which calls all nations throughout the earth to religious homage, has never been heard by thee? Or, if it has been heard, by what strange and false refinements hast thou stifled those natural sentiments which it tends to awaken? Calling thyself a son, a citizen, a friend; claiming to be faithful and affectionate in these relations; hast thou no sense of what thou owest to thy first Parent, thy highest Sovereign, thy greatest Benefactor? Can it be consistent with true virtue or honour, to value thyself upon thy regard to inferior obligations, and yet to violate that which is the most sacred and the most antient of all? When simple instinct teaches the Tartar and the Indian, together with his alms and good works, to join his prayers to that Power whom he considers as the source of good, shall it be no reproach in the most enlightened state of human nature, and under the purest dispensation of religion,

to have extinguished the sense of gratitude to Heaven, and to slight all acknowledgment of the great and the true God? What does such conduct imply, but either an entire want, or a wilful suppression, of some of the best and most generous affections belonging to human nature?—Surely, there must be an essential defect in that heart which remains cold and insensible, where it ought to be affected most warmly. Surely, such a degree of depravity must be lodged there, as is sufficient to taint all the other springs of pretended virtue.

But besides this, I must contend, in the second place, That where religion is neglected, there can be no regular nor steady practice of the duties of morality. The character will be often inconsistent; and Virtue, placed on a basis too narrow to support it, will be always loose and tottering. For such is the propensity of our nature to vice, so numerous are the temptations to a relaxed and immoral conduct, that stronger restraints than those of mere reason, are necessary to be imposed on man. The sense of right and wrong, the principle of honour, or the instinct of benevolence, are barriers too feeble to withstand the strength of passion. In the tranquil seasons of life, these natural principles may, perhaps, carry on the ordinary course of social duties with some regularity. But wait until some trying emergence come. Let the conflict of passions arise. Let the heart be either wounded by sore distress, or agitated by violent emotions; and you shall presently see, that virtue without religion is inadequate to the government of life. It is destitute of its proper guard, of its firmest support, of its chief encourage-

ment. It will sink under the weight of misfortune; or will yield to the solicitation of guilt.

The great motives that produce constancy and firmness of action, must be of a palpable and striking kind. A divine Legislator, uttering his voice from heaven; an omniscient Witness, beholding us in all our retreats; an almighty Governour, stretching forth his arm to punish or reward, disclosing the secrets of the invisible world, informing us of perpetual rest prepared hereafter for the righteous, and of *indignation and wrath* awaiting the wicked: These are the considerations which over-awe the world, which support integrity, and check guilt. They add to virtue that solemnity which should ever characterise it. To the admonitions of conscience they give the authority of a law. Co-operating with all the good dispositions of a pious man, they strengthen and insure their influence. On his alms you can have no certain dependence, who thinks not of God, nor has joined prayer to his charitable deeds. But when humanity is seconded by piety, the spring from which it flows is rendered, of course, more regular and constant. — In short, withdraw religion, and you shake all the pillars of morality. In every heart you weaken the influence of virtue: And among the multitude, the bulk of mankind, you overthrow its power.

Having thus shown that morality without devotion is both defective and unstable, I proceed to consider the other extreme, of prayers without alms, devotion without morality.

In every age the practice has prevailed, of substituting certain appearances of piety in the place of the great duties of humanity and mercy. Too many

there have always been, who flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining the friendship of their Creator, though they neglect to do justice to their fellow-creatures. But such persons may be assured, that their supposed piety is altogether of a spurious kind. It is an invention of their own, unknown to reason, unknown to the word of God. In scripture we are ever directed to try our faith by our works, our love of God by our love of men. We are directed to consider piety as a principle which regenerates the heart, and forms it to goodness. We are taught that in vain we address any acts of homage to Christ, unless we *do the things which he saith*; and that *love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness*, and *temperance*, are not only the injunctions of his law, but the native *fruits of his spirit*.* If therefore, while piety seems ardent, morality shall decline, you have full reason to believe, that into that piety some corrupting ingredients have entered. And if ever your regard to morality shall totally fail; if while you make many prayers, you give no alms; if while you appear to be zealous for God, you are false or unjust to men; if you are hard or contracted in heart, severe in your censures, and oppressive in your conduct; then conclude with certainty, that what you had termed piety was no more than an empty name. For as soon, according to the scripture similitude, will *bitter waters flow from a sweet fountain*, as such effects be produced by genuine piety.

What you have called by that name, resolves itself into one or other of three things. Either it is a hypocritical form of godliness, assumed in order to

* Luke, vi. 46. Gal. v. 22.

impose on the world; or, which is the most favourable supposition, it is a transient impression of seriousness, an accidental melting of the heart, which *passes away like the morning cloud and the early dew;* or, which I am afraid is too often the case, it is the deliberate refuge of a deluded and superstitious, but at the same time a corrupted mind. For all men, even the most depraved, are subject, more or less, to compunctions of conscience. It has never been in their power to withdraw totally beyond the reach of that warning voice, which tells them that something is necessary to be done, in order to make their peace with the Ruler of the world. But, backward at the same time to resign the gains of dishonesty, or the pleasures of vice; averse from submission to that sacred law, which enjoins righteousness in its whole extent, they have often attempted to make a sort of composition with Heaven; a composition which, though they dare not avow it in words, lurks in secret at the bottom of many a heart. If God will only dispense with some articles of obedience, they will repay him with abundant homage. If they fail in good practice, they will study to be sound in belief; and by the number of their prayers, will atone, in some measure, for their deficiency in charitable deeds.

But the attempt is as vain as it is impious. From the simplest and plainest principles of reason it must appear that religious worship, disjoined from justice and virtue, can upon no account whatever find acceptance with the Supreme Being. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths,*

*the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meetings.** — Cease, foolish and impious man! cease to consider the Almighty as a weak or vain-glorious being, who is to be appeased by thy devout prostrations, and thy humble words; or to be gratified by the parade and ostentation of external worship. What is all thy worship to him? *Will he eat the flesh of thy sacrifices, or drink the blood of offered goats?* Was worship required of thee, dost thou think, upon his account that thou mightest bring an increase to his glory and felicity by thy weak and insignificant praises? Sooner mightest thou increase the splendour of the sun by a lighted taper, or add to the thunder by thy voice. No: It is for the sake of man, not of God, that worship and prayers are required; not that God may be rendered more glorious, but that man may be made better; that he may be confirmed in a proper sense of his dependent state, and acquire those pious and virtuous dispositions in which his highest improvement consists.

Of all the principles in religion, one should take this to be the most evident; and yet frequent admonitions are needed, to renew the impression of it upon mankind. For what purpose did thy Creator place thee in this world, in the midst of human society, but that as a man among men thou mightest cultivate humanity; that each in his place might contribute to the general welfare: that as a spouse, a brother, a son, or a friend, thou mightest act thy part with an upright and a tender heart; and thus aspire to resemble Him who ever consults the good of his

* Isaiah, i. 11. 14.

creatures, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works?* And darest thou, who hast been sacrificing unsuspicious innocence to thy loose pleasures; thou, who hast been disturbing the repose of society by thine ambition or craft; thou who, to increase thy treasures, hast been making the widow and the orphan weep; darest thou approach God with thy worship and thy prayers, and entertain the hope that he will look down upon thee in peace? Will the God of order and justice accept such poor compensation for his violated laws? Will the God of love regard the services of one who is an enemy to his creatures? Shall a corrupter of the society of men aspire to the habitations of pure and blessed spirits? — Believe it, *He that saith he loveth God, must love his brother also. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow!* And then, *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to thee; call upon him in the day of trouble, and he will answer thee.* Thy prayers and thine alms shall then ascend in joint memorial before the Most High.

I HAVE now shewn the evil of maiming and splitting religion; of dividing asunder two things, which though in theory they may be separated, yet in practice must always co-exist, if either of them be real; Devotion to God, and Charity to men. Let us consider next the happy effects of their union.

Their union forms the consistent, the graceful, the respectable character of the real Christian, the man of true worth. If you leave either of them out of your system, even though you excel in the other, you can stand trial only in one point of view. It is

only on one side your character is fair; on the other, it will always be open to much reproach. And as you dishonour yourselves, so you do great injustice to religion. For, by dividing its parts from one another, you never fail to expose it to the censure of the world: And perhaps, by this sort of partial and divided goodness, religion has suffered more in the esteem of mankind, than by open profligacy. The unbeliever will scoff at your piety, when he sees you negligent of moral duties. The bigot will decry all morality, when he sees you pretending to be a follower of virtue, though you be a despiser of God. Whereas, he who fears God, and is at the same time just and beneficent to men, exhibits religion to the world with full propriety. It shines in his conduct with its native splendour; and its rays throw a glory round him. His character is above reproach. It is at once amiable and venerable. Malice itself is afraid to attack him; and even the worst men respect and honour him in their hearts.

This too is the man whose life will be most peaceful and happy. He who fails materially either in piety or in virtue, is always obnoxious to the anguish of remorse. His partial goodness may flatter him in the day of superficial observation; but when solitude or distress awakens the powers of reflection, he shall be made to feel that one part of duty performed, atones not for another which is neglected. In the midst of his prayers, the remembrance of injustice will upbraid him with hypocrisy; and in the distribution of his alms, the prayers which the poor put up for him, will make him blush for his neglect of God. Conscience will supply the place of the hand

coming forth to write over against him on the wall, *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.** Whereas he who *holds both faith and a good conscience,* who attends equally to the discharge of his duty towards God and towards man, enjoys, as far as human imperfection allows, the sense of fairness and consistency in conduct, of integrity and soundness of heart.

The man of mere morality is a stranger to all the delicate and refined pleasures of devotion. In works of beneficence and mercy, he may enjoy satisfaction. But his satisfaction is destitute of that glow of affection, which enlivens the feelings of one who lifts his heart at the same time to the Father of the Universe, and considers himself as imitating God. The man again who rests solely in devotion, if that devotion open not his heart to humanity, not only remains a stranger to the pleasures of beneficence, but must often undergo the pain arising from bad passions. But when beneficence and devotion are united, they pour upon the man in whom they meet, the full pleasures of a good and pure heart. His alms connected him with men, his prayers with God. He looks without dismay on both worlds. All nature has to him a benign aspect. If engaged in active life, he is the friend of men; and he is happy in the exertions of that friendship. If left in retirement, he walks among the works of nature as with God. Every object is enlivened to him by the sense of the Divine presence. Every where he traces the beneficent hand of the Author of nature; and every where, with glowing heart, he hears and answers his

* Dan. v. 27.

secret voice. When he looks up to heaven, he rejoices in the thought that there dwells that God whom he serves and honours; that Saviour in whom he trusts; that spirit of grace from whose inspiration his piety and his charity flow. When he looks around him on the world, he is soothed with the pleasing remembrance of good offices which he has done, or at least has studied to do, to many who dwell there. How comfortable the reflection, that him no poor man can upbraid for having withheld his due; him no unfortunate man can reproach for having seen and despised his sorrows; but that on his head are descending the prayers of the needy and the aged; and that the hands of those whom his protection has supported, or his bounty has fed, are lifted up in secret to bless him!

Life, passed under the influence of such dispositions, naturally leads to a happy end. It is not enough to say, that faith and piety, joined with active virtue, constitute the requisite preparation for heaven. They, in truth, begin the enjoyment of heaven. In every state of our existence, they form the chief ingredients of felicity. Hence, they are the great marks of Christian regeneration. They are the signature of that Holy Spirit, by which good men are said to be *sealed unto the day of redemption.* The text affords a striking proof of the estimation in which they are held by God. Amidst that infinite variety of human events which pass under his eye, the prayers and the alms of Cornelius attracted his particular notice. He remarked the amiable dispositions, which rose in the heart of this good man. But he saw that they were yet imperfect, while he remained unenlightened by the principles of the

Christian religion. In order to remove this obstruction to his rising graces, and to bring him to the full knowledge of that God whom he sought to honour, he was favoured with a supernatural message from heaven. While the princes of the earth were left to act by the councils of their own wisdom; while without interposition from above, generals conquered or fell, according to the vicissitude of human things; to this good centurion an angel was commissioned from the throne of God.

What can I say more or higher in praise of this blessed character, than that it is what God delights to honour? Men single out, as the objects of distinction, the great, the brave, or the renowned. But he *who seeth not as man seeth*, passing by those qualities which often shine with false splendour to human observation, looks to the inward principles of action; to those principles which form the essence of a worthy character, and which, if called forth, would give birth to whatever is laudable or excellent in conduct. Is there one, though in humble station, or obscure life, who *feareth God and worketh righteousness*; whose prayers and alms, proceeding in regular unaffected tenour, bespeak the upright, the tender, the devout heart? Those alms and prayers come up in memorial before that God who is *no respecter of persons*. The Almighty beholds him from his throne with complacency. Divine illumination is ready to instruct him. Angels minister to him. They now mark him out on earth as their future associate; and for him they make ready in paradise *the white robes, the palms, and the sceptres* of the just.

To this honour, to this blessedness, let our hearts continually aspire; and throughout the whole of life,

let those solemn and sacred words with which I conclude, sound in our ears, and be the great directory of our conduct.* *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but — to do justly and love mercy — and to walk humbly with thy God?*

* Micah, vi. 8.

SERMON II.

On the Influence of Religion upon Adversity.

Psalm xxvii. 5.

In the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock.

THE life of man has always been a very mixed state, full of uncertainty and vicissitudes, of anxieties and fears. In every religious audience, there are many who fall under the denomination of the unfortunate; and the rest are ignorant how soon they may be called to join them. For the prosperity of no man on earth is stable and assured. Dark clouds may soon gather over the heads of those whose sky is now most bright. In the midst of the deceitful calm which they enjoy, the storm that is to overwhelm them has perhaps already begun to ferment. *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.**

Hence, to a thoughtful mind, no study can appear more important, than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay, and, if they must befal, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every

* Eccles. xi. 8.

age, the wisdom of the wise, the treasures of the rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance; Philosophy has studied when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience; and Wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.

While the wisdom of the world is thus occupied, Religion has been no less attentive to the same important object. It informs us in the text, of a *pavilion*, which God erects to shelter his servants *in the time of trouble*; of a *secret place in his tabernacle*, into which he brings them; of a *rock on which he sets them up*; and elsewhere he tells us, of a *shield and a buckler*, which he spreads before them, *to cover them from the terrour by night, and the arrow that flieth by day*. Now of what nature are those instruments of defence which God is represented as providing with such solicitous care for those who fear him? Has he reared up any bulwarks, impregnable by misfortune, in order to separate the pious and virtuous from the rest of mankind, and to screen them from the common disasters of life? No; to those disasters we behold them liable no less than others. The defence which religion provides, is altogether of an internal kind. It is the heart, not the outward state, which it professes to guard. When the *time of trouble* comes, as come it must to all, it places good men under *the pavilion* of the Almighty, by affording them that security and peace which arise from the belief of Divine protection. It brings them into the *secret of his tabernacle*, by opening to them sources of con-

solation which are hidden from others. By that strength of mind with which it endows them, *it sets them up upon a rock*, against which the tempest may violently beat, but which it cannot shake.

How far the comforts proceeding from religion merit those high titles under which they are here figuratively described, I shall in this discourse endeavour to shew. I shall for this end compare together the situation of bad men, and that of the good, when both are suffering the misfortunes of life; and then make such improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. Religion prepares the mind for encountering, with fortitude, the most severe shocks of adversity; whereas vice, by its natural influence on the temper, tends to produce dejection under the slightest trials. While worldly men enlarge their possessions, and extend their connexions, they imagine that they are strengthening themselves against all the possible vicissitudes of life. They say in their hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved.* But so fatal is their delusion, that, instead of strengthening, they are weakening, that which can only support them when those vicissitudes come. It is their mind which must then support them; and their mind, by their sensual attachments, is corrupted and enfeebled. Addicted with intemperate fondness to the pleasures of the world, they incur two great and certain evils; they both exclude themselves from every resource except the world; and they increase their sensibility to every blow which comes upon them from that quarter.

They have neither principles nor temper which

can stand the assault of trouble. They have no principles which lead them to look beyond the ordinary rotation of events; and therefore, when misfortunes involve them, the prospect must be comfortless on every side. Their crimes have disqualified them from looking up to the assistance of any higher power than their own ability, or for relying on any better guide than their own wisdom. And as from principle they can derive no support, so in a temper corrupted by prosperity they find no relief. They have lost that moderation of mind which enables a wise man to accommodate himself to his situation. Long fed with false hopes, they are exasperated and stung by every disappointment. Luxurious and effeminate, they can bear no uneasiness. Proud and presumptuous, they can brook no opposition. By nourishing dispositions which so little suit this uncertain state, they have infused a double portion of bitterness into the cup of woe; they have sharpened the edge of that sword which is lifted up to smite them. Strangers to all the temperate satisfactions of a good and a pure mind; strangers to every pleasure except what was seasoned by vice or vanity, their adversity is to the last degree disconsolate. Health and opulence were the two pillars on which they rested. Shake either of them; and their whole edifice of hope and comfort falls. Prostrate and forlorn, they are left on the ground, obliged to join with the man of Ephraim in his abject lamentation, *They have taken away my gods which I have made, and what have I more?** — Such are the causes to which we must ascribe the broken spirits, the peevish temper and im-

* Judges, xviii. 24.

patient passions, that so often attend the declining age, or fallen fortunes, of vicious men.

But how different is the condition of a truly good man in those trying situations of life! Religion had gradually prepared his mind for all the events of this inconstant state. It had instructed him in the nature of true happiness. It had early weaned him from the undue love of the world, by discovering to him its vanity, and by setting higher prospects in his view. Afflictions do not attack him by surprise, and therefore do not overwhelm him. He was equipped for the storm, as well as the calm, in this dubious navigation of life. Under those conditions he knew himself to be brought hither, that he was not to retain always the enjoyment of what he loved: And therefore he is not overcome by disappointment, when that which is mortal, dies; when that which is mutable, begins to change; and when that which he knew to be transient, passes away.

All the principles which religion teaches, and all the habits which it forms, are favourable to strength of mind. It will be found, that whatever purifies, fortifies also the heart. In the course of living *righteously, soberly, and godly*, a good man acquires a steady and well-governed spirit. Trained, by Divine grace, to enjoy with moderation the advantages of the world, neither lifted up by success, nor enervated with sensuality, he meets the changes in his lot without unmanly dejection. He is inured to temperance and restraint. He has learned firmness and self-command. He is accustomed to look up to that Supreme Providence, which disposes of human affairs, not with reverence only, but with trust and hope.

The time of prosperity was to him not merely a season of barren joy, but productive of much useful

improvement. He had cultivated his mind. He had stored it with useful knowledge, with good principles, and virtuous dispositions. These resources remain entire, when the days of trouble come. They remain with him in sickness, as in health; in poverty, as in the midst of riches; in his dark and solitary hours, no less than when surrounded with friends and gay society. From the glare of prosperity he can, without dejection, withdraw into the shade. Excluded from several advantages of the world, he may be obliged to retreat into a narrower circle, but within that circle he will find many comforts left. His chief pleasures were always of the calm, innocent, and temperate kind; and over these, the changes of the world have the least power. His mind is a kingdom to him; and he can still enjoy it. The world did not bestow upon him all his enjoyments; and therefore it is not in the power of the world, by its most cruel attacks, to carry them all away.

II. The distresses of life are alleviated to good men by reflections on their past conduct; while, by such reflections, they are highly aggravated to the bad. During the gay and active periods of life, sinners elude, in some measure, the force of conscience. Carried round in the world of affairs and pleasures; intent on contrivance or eager in pursuit; amused by hope, or elated by enjoyment; they are sheltered by that crowd of trifles which surrounds them from serious thought. But conscience is too great a power, to remain always suppressed. There is in every man's life, a period when he shall be made to stand forth as a real object to his own view: And when that period comes, woe to him who is galled by the

sight! In the dark and solitary hour of distress, with a mind hurt and sore from some recent wound of fortune, how shall he bear to have his character for the first time disclosed to him in that humiliating light under which guilt will necessarily present it? Then the recollection of the past becomes dreadful. It exhibits to him a life thrown away on vanities and follies, or consumed in flagitiousness and sin; no station properly supported; no material duties fulfilled. Crimes which once had been easily palliated, rise before him in their native deformity. The sense of guilt mixes itself with all that has befallen him. He beholds, or thinks that he beholds, the hand of the God whom he hath offended, openly stretched out against him. — At a season when a man stands most in need of support, how intolerable is the weight of this additional load, aggravating the depression of disease, disappointment, or old age! How miserable his state, who is condemned to endure at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexations of calamity! *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*

Whereas, he who is blessed with a clear conscience, enjoys in the worst conjunctures of human life, a peace, a dignity, an elevation of mind peculiar to virtue. The testimony of a good conscience is indeed to be always distinguished from that presumptuous boast of innocence, which every good Christian totally disclaims. The better he is, he will be the more humble and sensible of his failings. But though he acknowledge that he can claim nothing from God upon the footing of desert, yet he can trust in his merciful acceptance through Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the gospel. He can hope that his

prayers and his alms have come up in memorial before God. The piety and virtue of his former life were as seeds sown in his prosperous state, of which he reaps the fruits in the season of adversity. The riches, the pleasures, and the friends of the world, may have made *wings to themselves and flown away.* But the improvement which he made of those advantages while they lasted, the temperate spirit with which he enjoyed them, the beneficent actions which he performed, and the good example which he set to others, remain behind. By the memory of these he enjoys his prosperity a second time in reflection; and perhaps this second and reflected enjoyment is not inferior to the first. It arrives at a more critical and needful time. It affords him the high satisfaction of having extracted lasting pleasure from that which is short, and of having fixed that which by its nature was changing.—"If my race be now about "to end, I have this comfort, that it has not been "run in vain. *I have fought the good fight; I have "kept the faith.* My mind has no load. Futurity "has no terrours. I have endeavoured to do my "duty, and to make my peace with God. I leave "the rest to Heaven." These are the reflections which *to the upright make light arise in darkness;* reflections which cheer the lonely house of virtuous poverty, and attend the conscientious sufferer into prison or exile; which soothe the complaints of grief, lighten the pressure of old age, and furnish to the bed of sickness, a cordial of more grateful relish, and more sovereign virtue, than any which the world can afford.

Look abroad into life, and you will find the general sense of mankind bearing witness to this import-

ant truth, that mind is superiour to fortune; that what one feels within is of much greater importance than all that befalls him without. Let a man be brought into some such severe and trying situation, as fixes the attention of the public on his behaviour. The first question which we put concerning him, is not, What does he suffer? but, How does he bear it? Has he a quiet mind? or, Does he appear to be unhappy within? If we judge him to be composed and firm, resigned to Providence, and supported by conscious integrity, his character rises, and his misery lessens in our view. We esteem and admire, rather than pity him. Recollect what holy men have endured for the sake of conscience, and with what cheerfulness they have suffered. On the other hand, when conscience has concurred with outward misfortunes in distressing the guilty, think of the dreadful consequences which have ensued. How often, upon a reverse of fortune, after abused prosperity, have they madly hurried themselves over that precipice from which there is no return; and, in what nature most abhors, the voluntary extinction of life, have sought relief from that torment of reflection, which was become too great for them to bear?

Never then allow yourselves to imagine that misfortunes alone form the chief misery of man. None but the guilty are completely miserable. The misgiving and distrust, the accusations and reproaches of their minds, the sense of having drawn down upon their heads the evils which they suffer, and the terrifying expectation of more and worse evils to come; these are the essential ingredients of human misery. They not only whet the edge, but they envenom the

darts of affliction, and add poison to the wound. Whereas, when misfortunes assail a good man, they carry no such fatal auxiliaries in their train; they may ruffle the surface of his soul; but there is a strength within, which resists their farther impression. The constitution of his mind is sound. The world can inflict upon it no wounds, but what admit of cure.

III. Ill men, in the time of trouble, can look up to no protector: while good men commit themselves, with trust and hope, to the care of Heaven. The human mind, naturally feeble, is made to feel all its weakness by the pressure of adversity. Dejected with evils which overpower its strength, it relies no longer on itself. It casts every where around, a wishing, exploring eye, for some shelter to screen, some power to uphold it; and if, when abandoned by the world, it can find nothing to which it may fly in the room of the world, its state is truly forlorn. Now, whither should the ungodly in this situation, turn for aid? After having contended with the storms of adverse fortune till their spirits are exhausted, gladly would they retreat at last to the sanctuary of religion. But that sanctuary is shut against them; nay, it is environed with terrours. They behold there, not a Protector to whom they can fly, but a Judge whom they dread; and in those moments when they need his friendship the most, they are reduced to deprecate his wrath. If he once *called when they refused, and stretched out his hands when they would not regard*, how much reason have they to fear that he will leave them now *to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices*; that he

will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh?

But of all the thoughts which can enter into the mind, in the season of distress, the belief of an interest in his favour who rules the world is the most soothing. Every form of religion has afforded to virtuous men some degree of this consolation. But it was reserved for the Christian revelation, to carry it to its highest point. For it is the direct scope of that revelation, to accommodate itself to the circumstances of man, under two main views; as guilty in the sight of God, and as struggling with the evils of the world. Under the former, it discovers to him a Mediator and an atonement; under the latter, it promises him the Spirit of grace and consolation. It is a system of complete relief, extended from our spiritual to our temporal distresses. The same hand which holds out forgiveness to the penitent, and resistance to the frail, dispenses comfort and hope to the afflicted.

It deserves your particular notice, in this view, that there is no character which God more frequently assumes to himself in the sacred writings, than that of the Patron of the distressed. Compassion is that attribute of his nature which he has chosen to place in the greatest variety of lights on purpose that he might accommodate his majesty to our weakness, and provide a cordial for human griefs. He is the hearer of all prayers; but with particular attention he is represented as listening to the *cry of the poor*, and *regarding the prayer of the destitute*. All his creatures he governs with justice and wisdom; but he takes to himself, in a special manner, the charge of *executing judgment for the oppressed*, of *protecting the stranger*, of *delivering him who hath no helper*,

*from the hand of the spoiler. For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, will I arise, saith the Lord, to set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. He is the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows, in his holy habitation. He raiseth them up that are bowed down. He dwelleth with the contrite. He healeth the broken in heart. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are * dust.* — If the wisdom of his providence saw it necessary to place so many of his creatures in an afflicted state, that state, however, he commiserates. He disdains not to point out himself as the refuge of the virtuous and pious; and to invite them, amidst all their troubles, to pour out their hearts before him. Those circumstances which estrange others from them, interest him the more in their situation. The neglect or scorn of the world exposes them not to any contempt in his sight. No obscurity conceals them from his notice; and though they should be forgotten by every friend on earth, they are remembered by the God of heaven. That sigh, heaved from the afflicted bosom, which is heard by no human ear, is listened to by him; and that tear is remarked, which falls unnoticed or despised by the world.

Such views of the Supreme Being impart the most sensible consolation to every pious heart. They present his administration under an aspect so mild and benign, as in a great measure to disperse the gloom which hangs over human life. A good man acts with a vigour, and suffers with a patience more than human, when he believes himself countenanced by the Almighty. Injured or oppressed by the world, he looks

* Psalm ix. 8. — cii. 17. — cxlvi. 7. — lxviii. 5. — cxlvii. 3. — ciii. 14, &c.

up to a Judge, who will vindicate his cause; he appeals to a Witness who knows his integrity; he commits himself to a Friend who will never forsake him. When tired with the vexations of life, devotion opens to him its quiet retreat, where the tumults of the world are hushed, and its cares are lost in happy oblivion; where *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.* There his mind regains its serenity; the agitation of passion is calmed; and a softening balm is infused into the wounds of the spirit. Disclosing to an invisible Friend those secret griefs which he has no encouragement to make known to the world, his heart is lightened. He does not feel himself solitary or forsaken. He believes God to be present with him, and the Holy Ghost to be the inspirer of his consolations. From that *secret place of the Divine tabernacle,* into which the Text represents him as admitted, he hears this voice issue, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee. Fear not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God.* And as he hears a voice which speaks to none but the pure in heart, so he beholds a hand which sinners cannot see. He beholds the hand of Providence conducting all the hidden springs and movements of the universe; and with a secret, but unerring operation, directing every event towards the happiness of the righteous. Those afflictions which appear to others the messengers of the wrath of Heaven, appear to him the ministers of sanctification and wisdom. Where they discern nothing but the horrours of the tempest which surrounds them, his more enlightened eye beholds the angel who rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. Hence a *peace keeping the mind and heart,* which is

no where to be found but under the *pavilion of the Almighty.*

IV. Good men are comforted under their troubles by the hope of Heaven; while bad men are not only deprived of this hope, but distressed with fears arising from a future state. The soul of man can never divest itself wholly of anxiety about its fate hereafter. There are hours when even to the prosperous, in the midst of their pleasures, eternity is an awful thought. But much more when those pleasures, one after another, begin to withdraw; when life alters its forms, and becomes dark and cheerless; when its changes warn the most inconsiderate, that what is so mutable will soon pass entirely away; then with pungent earnestness comes home that question to the heart, Into what world are we next to go? —— How miserable the man, who, under the distractions of calamity, hangs doubtful about an event which so nearly concerns him; who, in the midst of doubts and anxieties, approaching to that awful boundary which separates this world from the next, shudders at the dark prospect before him; wishing to exist after death, and yet afraid of that existence; catching at every feeble hope which superstition can afford him, and trembling, in the same moment, from reflection upon his crimes.

But blessed be God who hath *brought life and immortality to light*, who hath not only brought them to light, but secured them to good men: and, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hath *begotten them unto the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Justly is this hope styled in Scripture, the *anchor of*

the soul, both sure and stedfast. For what an anchor is to a ship in a dark night, on an unknown coast, and amidst a boisterous ocean, that is this hope to the soul, when distracted by the confusions of the world. In danger, it gives security; amidst general fluctuation, it affords one fixed point of rest. It is indeed the most eminent of all the advantages which religion now confers. For, consider the mighty power of hope over the human mind. It is the universal comforter. It is the spring of all human activity. Upon futurity, men are constantly suspended. Animated by the prospect of some distant good, they toil and suffer through the whole course of life; and it is not so much what they are at present, as what they hope to be in some after-time, that enlivens their motions, fixes attention, and stimulates industry. Now, if, in the common affairs of life, such is the energy of hope, even when its object is neither very considerable, nor very certain; what effects may it not be expected to produce, when it rests upon an object so splendid as a life of immortal felicity? Were this hope entertained with that full persuasion which Christian faith demands, it would, in truth, not merely alleviate, but totally annihilate, all human miseries. It would banish discontent, extinguish grief, and suspend the very feeling of pain.

But allowing for the mixture of human frailty; admitting those abatements which our imperfection makes upon the effect of every religious principle, still you will find, that in proportion to the degree in which the hope of heaven operates upon good men, they will be tranquil under sufferings; nay, they will be happy, in comparison of those who enjoy no such

relief. What indeed, in the course of human affairs, is sufficient to distress, far less to overwhelm, the mind of that man who can look down on all human things from an elevation so much above them? He is only a passenger through this world. He is travelling to a happier country. How disagreeable soever the occurrences of his journey may be, yet at every stage of that journey he receives the assurance that he is drawing nearer and nearer to the period of rest and felicity. — Endure, and thou shalt overcome. Persevere, and thou shalt be successful. The time of trial hastens to a close. Thy mansion is prepared above; thy rest remaineth among the people of God. The disorders which vice has introduced into the works of God, are about to terminate; and all tears are soon to be wiped away from the eyes of the just. — The firm assurance of this happy conclusion to the vexations and the vanities of life, works a greater effect on the sincere illiterate Christian, than all the refinements of philosophy can work on the most learned Infidel. These may gratify the mind that is at ease; may soothe the heart when slightly discomposed; but when it is sore and deeply torn; when bereaved of its best and most beloved comforts, the only consolations that can then find access, arise from the hope of a better world; where those comforts shall be again restored; and all the virtuous shall be assembled, in the presence of him who made them. Such hopes banish that despair which overwhelms, and leave only that tender melancholy which softens the heart, and often renders the whole character more gentle and amiable.

Of this nature are the resources which religion

provides for good men. By its previous discipline, it trains them to fortitude; by the reflections of a good conscience it soothes, by the sense of Divine favour it supports them; and when every comfort fails them on earth, it cheers them with the hope of heaven. Distinguishing his servants with such advantages, God is justly said to erect *his pavilion* over them in the evil time. He not only *spreads a tent for them in the wilderness*, but he transforms in some measure the state of nature around them. To use the beautiful language of ancient prophecy; *In the desart, the thirsty land where no water is, he openeth springs. Instead of the thorn, he maketh the fir-tree to come up; instead of the briar, the myrtle to spring. In the midst of the habitation of dragons, he maketh green pastures rise, and still waters flow around his people.*

The improvement to be made of these truths is as obvious as it is important. Let us study so to conduct our lives, that we may be qualified for deriving such consolations from religion. To their reality, and their importance, all mankind bear witness. For no sooner are they overtaken by distress, than to religion they fly. This throughout every age, has been the universal shelter which the young and the old, the high and the low, the giddy and the serious, have sought to gain as soon as they found that rest could be no where else procured for the weary head or the aching heart. But amidst those multitudes that crowd to religion for relief, how few are entitled to approach that sacred source of comfort? On what feeble props do their hopes and pretensions rest? How much superstition mingles with that religion to which men are driven by distress and fear! — You

must first apply to it as the guide of life, before you can have recourse to it as the refuge of sorrow. You must submit to its legislative authority, and experience its renewing influence, before you can look for its consolatory effect. You must secure the testimony of a good conscience, and peace with God through Jesus Christ; otherwise, *when the floods shall come, and the rains descend, and the winds blow*, the house which you had proposed for your retreat, shall prove the *house founded on the sand not on the rock.*

There are two plans, and there are but two, on which any man can propose to conduct himself through the dangers and distresses of human life. The one is the plan of worldly wisdom; the other, that of determined adherence to conscience. He who acts upon the former lays principle aside, and trusts his defence to his art and ability. He avails himself of every advantage which his knowledge of the world suggests. He attends to nothing but what he considers as his interest; and unconfined by conscience, pursues it by every course which promises him success. This plan, though too often adopted, will be found, on trial, ineffectual and deceitful. For human ability is an unequal match for the violent and unforeseen vicissitudes of the world. When these torrents rise in their might, they sweep away in a moment the banks which worldly wisdom had reared for defence, and overwhelm alike the crafty and the artless. In the mean time, persons of this character condemn themselves to live a most unquiet life. They pass their days in perpetual anxiety, listening to every motion; startled by every alarm; changing their measures on every new occurrence; and when

distress breaks in over all their defences, they are left under it hopeless and disconsolate.

The plan, which in opposition to this religion recommends, as both more honourable in itself, and more effectual for security, is, at all hazards, to do your duty, and to leave the consequences to God. Let him who would act upon this plan, adopt for the rule of his conduct that maxim of the Psalmist's, *Trust in the Lord and do good.** To firm integrity, let him join a humble reliance on God. Let his adherence to duty encourage his religious trust. Let his religious trust inspire him with fortitude in the performance of his duty. Let him know no path but the straight and direct one. In the most critical moments of action, let him ask no farther questions, than what is the right, the fit, the worthy part? How, as a man, and as a Christian, it becomes him to act? Having received the decision of conscience, let him *commit his way unto the Lord.* Let him without trepidation or wavering proceed in discharging his duty; resolved, that though the world may make him unfortunate, it shall never make him base; and confiding, that in what God and his conscience require him to act or suffer, God and a good conscience will support him. —— Such principles as these, are the best preparation for the vicissitudes of the human lot. They are the shield of inward peace. He who thinks and acts thus, shall be exposed to no wounds but what religion can cure. He may feel the blows of adversity; but he shall not know the wounds of the heart.

* Psalm xxxviii. 3.

SERMON III.

On the Influence of Religion upon Prosperity.

Psalm i. 3.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper.

THE happy influence of religion upon human life, in the time of adversity, has been considered in the preceding discourse. Concerning this the sentiments of men are more generally agreed, than with respect to some other prerogatives which religion claims. They very readily assign to it the office of a Comforter. But as long as their state is prosperous, they are apt to account it an unnecessary guest, perhaps an unwelcome intruder. Let us not be thus unjust to religion, nor confine its importance to one period only in the life of man. It was never intended to be merely the nurse of sickness, and the staff of old age. I purpose now to shew you, that it is no less essential to the enjoyment of prosperity, than to the comfort of adversity: That prosperity is prosperous, if we may be allowed the expression, to a good man only; and that to every other person, it will prove, notwithstanding its fair appearance, a barren and joyless state.

The Psalmist, in the text, by an image taken from one of the most beautiful objects in nature, describes

a man who flourishes in full prosperity. But to whom is the description limited? To him, as the preceding verses inform us, *that walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but hath his delight in the law of God.* He only is *like the tree planted by the rivers of water;* whilst *the ungodly,* as he adds, *are not so;* but how prosperous soever they may appear to the world, are in truth but like *the chaff which the wind driveth away.* In confirmation of this doctrine, I shall lay before you some of those circumstances which distinguish the prosperity of the good man beyond that of the sinner; and shall conclude with pointing out the dangers and miseries into which the latter is apt to be betrayed by his favourable situation in the world.

I. Piety, and gratitude to God, contribute in a high degree to enliven prosperity. Gratitude is a pleasing emotion. The sense of being distinguished by the kindness of another, gladdens the heart, warms it with reciprocal affection, and gives to any possession, which is agreeable in itself, a double relish, from its being the gift of a friend. Favours conferred by men, I acknowledge may prove burdensome. For human virtue is never perfect; and sometimes unreasonable expectations on the one side, sometimes a mortifying sense of dependence on the other, corrode in secret the pleasure of benefits, and convert the obligations of friendship into grounds of jealousy. But nothing of this kind can affect the intercourse of gratitude with Heaven. Its favours are wholly disinterested; and with a gratitude the most cordial and unsuspicious, a good man looks up

to that Almighty Benefactor, who aims at no end but the happiness of those whom he blesses, and who desires no return from them but a devout and thankful heart. While others can trace their prosperity to no higher source than a concurrence of worldly causes, and, often, of mean or trifling incidents which occasionally favoured their designs; with what superiour satisfaction does the servant of God remark the hand of that gracious Power which hath raised him up; which hath happily conducted him through the various steps of life, and crowned him with the most favourable distinction beyond his equals?

Let us farther consider, that not only gratitude for the past, but a cheering sense of God's favour at the present enter into the pious emotion. They are only the virtuous, who in their prosperous days hear this voice addressed to them: *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy* * *works.* He who is the Author of their prosperity gives them a title to enjoy, with complacency, his own gift. While bad men snatch the pleasures of the world as by stealth, without countenance from God, the proprietor of the world; the righteous sit openly down to the feast of life, under the smile of approving Heaven. No guilty fears damp their joys. The blessing of God rests upon all that they possess! his protection surrounds them; and hence, *in the habitations of the righteous is found the voice of rejoicing and salvation.* A lustre unknown to others invests, in their sight, the whole face of nature. Their piety reflects a sunshine from heaven upon

* Eccles. ix. 7.

the prosperity of the world; unites, in one point of view, the smiling aspect, both of the powers above and of the objects below. Not only have they as full a relish as others, of the innocent pleasures of life, but, moreover, in these they hold communion with God. In all that is good or fair, they trace his hand. From the beauties of nature, from the improvements of art, from the enjoyments of social life, they raise their affection to the source of all the happiness which surrounds them; and thus widen the sphere of their pleasures, by adding intellectual, and spiritual, to earthly joys.

For illustration of what I have said on this head, remark that cheerful enjoyment of a prosperous state which King David had, when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm; and compare the highest pleasures of the riotous sinner, with the happy and satisfied spirit which breathes throughout that Psalm.—In the midst of the splendour of royalty, with what amiable simplicity of gratitude does he look up to the Lord as *his Shepherd;* happier in ascribing all his success to divine favour, than to the policy of his councils, or to the force of his arms! How many instances of divine goodness arose before him in pleasing remembrance when with such relish he speaks of the *green pastures and still waters beside which God had led him:* of *his cup which he hath made to overflow;* and of *the table which he hath prepared for him in presence of his enemies!* With what perfect tranquillity does he look forward to the time of his passing through *the valley of the shadow of death;* unappalled by that Spectre, whose most distant appearance blasts the prosperity of sinners! He fears no evil, as

long as *the rod and the staff* of his Divine Shepherd are with him; and through all the unknown periods of this and of future existence, commits himself to his guidance with secure and triumphant hope. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* — What a purified, sentimental enjoyment of prosperity, is here exhibited! How different from that gross relish of worldly pleasures, which belongs to those who behold only the terrestrial side of things; who raise their views to no higher objects than the succession of human contingencies, and the weak efforts of human ability; who have no protector or patron in the heavens, to enliven their prosperity, or to warm their hearts with gratitude and trust.

II. RELIGION affords to good men peculiar security in the enjoyment of their prosperity. One of the first reflections which must strike every thinking man, after his situation in the world has become agreeable, is, That the continuance of such a situation is most uncertain. From a variety of causes, he lies open to change. On many sides he sees that he may be pierced; and the wider his comforts extend, the broader is the mark which he spreads to the arrows of misfortune. Hence many a secret alarm to the reflecting mind; and to those who reject all such alarms, the real danger increases, in proportion to their improvident security.

By worldly assistance it is vain to think of providing any effectual defence, seeing the world's mutability is the very cause of our terrour. It is from a higher principle, from a power superiour to the world,

that relief must be sought amidst such disquietudes of the heart. He who in his prosperity can look up to One who is witness to his moderation, humanity, and charity; he who can appeal to Heaven, that he has not been elated by pride, nor overcome by pleasure, but has studied to employ its gifts to the honour of the Giver; this man, if there be any truth in religion, if there be any benignity or goodness in the administration of the universe, has just cause for encouragement and hope. Not that an interest in the divine Grace will perpetuate to a good man, more than to others, a life of unruffled prosperity. Change and alteration form the very essence of the world. But let the world change around him at pleasure, he has ground to hope that it shall not be able to make him unhappy. Whatever may vary, God's providence is still the same; and his love to the righteous remains unaltered. If it shall be the Divine will to remove one comfort, he trusts that some other shall be given. Whatever is given, whatever is taken away, he confides that in the last result all *shall work for his good.*

Hence he is not disturbed, like bad men, by the instability of the world. Dangers, which overcome others, shake not his more steady mind. He enjoys the pleasures of life pure and unallayed, because he enjoys them, as long as they last, without anxious terrours. They are not his all, his only good. He welcomes them when they arrive; and when they pass away, he can eye them, as they depart, without agony or despair. His prosperity strikes a deeper and firmer root than that of the ungodly. And for this reason he is compared, in the Text, to a *tree planted by the rivers of water:* a tree whose branches

the tempest may indeed bend, but whose roots it cannot touch; a tree, which may occasionally be stripped of its leaves and blossoms, but which still maintains its place, and in due season flourishes anew. Whereas the sinner in his prosperity, according to the allusion in the book of Job, resembles *the rush that groweth up in the mire**; a slender reed, that may flourish green for a while by the side of the brook, as long as it is cherished by the sun, and fanned by the breeze; till the first bitter blast breaks its feeble stem, roots it out from its bed, and lays it in the dust. Lo! such is the prosperity of *them that forget God; and thus their hope shall perish.*

III. Religion forms good men to the most proper temper for the enjoyment of prosperity. A little reflection may satisfy us, that mere possession, even granting it to be secure, does not constitute enjoyment. Give a man all that is in the power of the world to bestow; surround him with riches; crown him with honours; invest him, if you will, with absolute dominion; but leave him at the same time under some secret oppression or heaviness of heart; you bestow indeed the materials of enjoyment, but you deprive him of ability to extract it. You set a feast before him, but he wants the power of tasting it. Hence prosperity is so often an equivocal word, denoting merely affluence of possession, but unjustly applied to the miserable possessor.

We all know the effects which any indisposition of the body, even though slight, produces on external prosperity. Visit the gayest and most fortunate man on earth, only with sleepless nights; disorder any

*Job, viii. 11.

single organ of the senses; corrode but one of his smallest nerves; and you shall presently see all his gaiety vanish; and you shall hear him complain that he is a miserable creature, and express his envy of the peasant and the cottager. — And can you believe that a disease in the soul is less fatal to enjoyment than a disease in the animal frame; or that a sound mind is not as essential as a sound body to the prosperity of man? Let us rate sensual gratifications as high as we please, we shall be made to feel that the seat of enjoyment is in the soul. The corrupted temper, and the guilty passions of the bad, frustrate the effect of every advantage which the world confers on them. The world may call them men of pleasure; but of all men they are the greatest foes to pleasure. From their eagerness to grasp, they strangle and destroy it. None but the temperate, the regular, and the virtuous, know how to enjoy prosperity. They bring to its comforts the manly relish of a sound uncorrupted mind. They stop at the proper point, before enjoyment degenerates into disgust, and pleasure is converted into pain. They are strangers to those complaints which flow from spleen, caprice, and all the fantastical distresses of a vitiated mind. While riotous indulgence enervates both the body and the mind, purity and virtue heighten all the powers of human fruition. Moderate and simple pleasures relish high with the temperate; in the midst of his studied refinements, the voluptuary languishes.

Wherever guilt mingles with prosperity, a certain gloom and heaviness enter along with it. Vicious intrigues never fail to entangle and embarrass those who engage in them. But innocence confers ease

and freedom on the mind; leaves it open to every pleasing sensation; gives a lightness to the spirits, similar to the native gaiety of youth and health; ill imitated, and ill supplied, by that forced levity of the vicious, which arises not from the health, but from the drunkenness of the mind.

Feeble are all pleasures in which the heart has no part. The selfish gratifications of the bad, are both narrow in their circle, and short in their duration. But prosperity is redoubled to a good man, by his generous use of it. It is reflected back upon him from every one whom he makes happy. In the intercourse of domestic affection, in the attachment of friends, the gratitude of dependants, the esteem and good-will of all who know him, he sees blessings multiplied round him, on every side. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing with joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not, I searched out.** — Thus, while the righteous *flourished like a tree planted by the rivers of water, he bringeth forth* also *his fruit in his season;* and that fruit, to pursue the allusion of the text, he brings forth, not for himself alone. He flourishes, not like a tree in some solitary desert, which scatters its blossoms to the wind, and communicates neither fruit nor shade to any living thing; but like a tree in the midst of an inhabited country, which to some affords friendly shelter, to others,

* Job, xxix. 11—17.

fruit; which is not only admired by all for its beauty, but blessed by the traveller for the shade, and by the hungry for the sustenance it hath given.

IV. Religion heightens the prosperity of good men, by the prospect which it affords them of greater happiness to come in another world. I showed, in the foregoing discourse, the mighty effect of the hope of Heaven, in relieving the mind under the troubles of life. And sure, if this hope be able to support the falling, it cannot but improve the flourishing state of man; if it can dispel the thickest gloom of adversity, it must needs enliven prosperity, by the additional lustre which it throws upon it. What is present, is never sufficient to give us full satisfaction. To the present we must always join some agreeable anticipations of futurity, in order to complete our pleasure. What an accession then must the prosperity of the righteous man receive, when borne with a smooth and gentle gale along the current of life, and looking round on all the blessings of his state, he can consider these as no more than an introduction to higher scenes which are hereafter to open; he can view his present life, as only the porch through which he is to pass into the palace of bliss; and his present joys, as but a feeble stream, dispensed for his occasional refreshment, until he arrive at that river of life, which flows at God's right hand! — Such prospects purify the mind, at the same time that they gladden it. They prevent the good man from setting too high a value on his present possessions; and thereby assist him in maintaining, amidst the temptations of worldly pleasure, that command of himself which is so essential to the wise and temperate enjoyment of prosperity.

It is the fate of all human pleasures, by continuance, to fade; of most of them, to cloy. Hence, in the most prosperous state, there are frequent intervals of languor, and even of dejection. There are vacuities in the happiest life, which it is not in the power of the world to fill up. What relief so adapted to those vacant or dejected periods, as the pleasing hopes which arise from immortality? How barren and imperfect that prosperity, which can have recourse to no such subsidiary comfort, in order to animate the stagnation of vulgar life, and to supply the insufficiency of worldly pleasures!

Worldly prosperity declines with declining life. In youth its relish was brisk and poignant. It becomes more sober as life advances; and flattens as life descends. He who lately overflowed with cheerful spirits and high hopes, begins to look back with heaviness on the days of former years. He thinks of his old companions who are gone; and reviews past scenes, more agreeable than any which are likely to return. The activity of pursuit is weakened. The gaiety of amusement is fled. The gratifications of sense languish. When his accustomed pleasures, one after another, thus steal treacherously away, what can he, who is an utter stranger to religion, and to the hope of Heaven, substitute in their place?—But even in that drooping period, the promises and hopes of religion support the spirits of a good man to the latest hour. *His leaf*, it is said in the text, *shall not wither*. It shall not be in the power of time to blast his prosperity: But old age shall receive him into a quiet retreat, where if lively sensations fail, gentle pleasures remain to soothe him. That hope of

immortality, which formerly improved his other enjoyments, now in a great measure supplies their absence. Its importance rises, in proportion as its object draws near. He is not forsaken by the world, but retires from it with dignity; reviewing with a calm mind the part which he has acted, and trusting to the promise of God for an approaching reward. Such sentiments and expectations shed a pleasing tranquillity over the old age of the righteous man. They make the evening of his days go down unclouded; and allow the stream of life, though fallen low, to run clear to the last drop.

THUS I have shewn, I hope, with full evidence, what material ingredients religion and a good conscience are in the prosperity of life. Separated from them, prosperity, how fair soever it may seem to the world, is insipid, nay frequently noxious to the possessor: United with them, it rises into a real blessing bestowed by God upon man. *God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy, but to the sinner he giveth sore travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.* *

ALLOW me now to conclude the subject, with representing to the prosperous men of the world, those crimes and miseries into which the abuse of their condition is likely to betray them, and calling upon them to beware of the dangers with which they are threatened.

It is unfortunate for mankind, that those situa-

* Eccles. ii. 26.

tions which favour pleasure, are too generally adverse to virtue. Virtue requires internal government and discipline; prosperity relaxes the mind, and inflames the passions. Virtue is supported by a regard to what is future; prosperity attaches us wholly to what is present. The characteristics of virtue, are modesty and humility; the most common attendants of prosperity, are pride and presumption. One should think, that prosperity would prove the strongest incitement to remember and to honour that God who bestows it. Yet such is the perverseness of human nature, that it proves much oftener the motive to impiety. The changes of the world call the attention of men to an invisible Power. But a train of events proceeding according to their wish, leads them to nothing beyond what they see. The Supreme Giver is concealed from view by his own gifts. This instance of success they ascribe to a fortunate concurrence of worldly causes; that acquisition, to their own skill and industry; unmindful of Him, who from the beginning arranged that series of causes, and who placed them in circumstances where their industry could operate with success. From forgetting God, they too often proceed to despise him. All that is light or giddy in their minds is set in motion by the gale of prosperity. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are lifted up; and their state is considered, as secured by their own strength. Hence that *pride of countenance*, through which the wicked in their prosperity, as David observes, *refuse to seek after God.* They are described as *speaking loftily, and setting their mouth against the Heavens. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the*

organ; and they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or, what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

They say unto God, depart from us. — What an impious voice! Could we have believed it possible, that worldly pleasures should so far intoxicate any human heart? Wretched and infatuated men! Have you ever examined on what your confidence rests! — You have said in your hearts, *You shall never be moved;* you fancy yourselves placed on a *mountain which standeth strong.* Awake from those flattering dreams, and behold how every thing totters around you! You stand on the edge of a precipice; and the ground is sliding away below your feet. In your health, life, possessions, connections, pleasures, principles of destruction work. The mine advances in secret, which saps the foundations, while you revel on the surface. No mighty effort, no long preparation of events, is needed to overturn your prosperity. By slow degrees it rose. Long time, much labour, and the concurrence of many assisting causes, were necessary to rear it up; but one slight incident can entirely overthrow it. Suspicions are infused into the patron or the prince on whom you depend; and your disgrace ensues. Exercise, or amusement, kindles a fever in the veins of those whom you loved; and you are robbed of your comforts and hopes. A few grains of sand lodge themselves within you; and the rest of your life is disease and misery. Ten thousand contingencies ever float on the current of life, the smallest of which, if it meet your frail bark in the passing, is sufficient to dash it in pieces. — Is this a place, is this a time to swell with fancied security, to riot in

unlawful pleasure, and, by your disregard of moral and religious duties, to brave the government of the Almighty? He hath stamped every possession of man with this inscription, *Rejoice with trembling*. Throughout every age, he hath pointed his peculiar displeasure against the confidence of presumption, and the arrogance of prosperity. He hath pronounced, that *whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased*. And shall neither the admonitions which you receive from the visible inconstancy of the world, nor the declarations of the Divine displeasure, be sufficient to check your thoughtless career? Know that, by your impiety, you multiply the dangers which already threaten you on every side; you accelerate the speed with which the changes of the world advance to your destruction. The Almighty touches with his rod that edifice of dust, on which you stand, and boast of your strength; and, at that instant, it crumbles to nothing.

As men, then, bethink yourselves of human instability. As Christians, reverence the awful government of God. Insure your prosperity, by consecrating it to religion and virtue. Be humble in your elevation; be moderate in your views; be submissive to Him who hath raised and distinguished you. Forget not, that on his providence you are as dependent, and to the obedience of his laws as much bound, as the meanest of your fellow-creatures. Disgrace not your station, by that grossness of sensuality, that levity of dissipation, or that insolence of rank, which bespeak a little mind. Let the affability of your behaviour show that you remember the natural equality of men. Let your moderation in pleasure, your command of passion, and your steady regard to

the great duties of life, show that you possess a mind worthy of your fortune. Establish your character on the basis of esteem; not on the flattery of dependents, or the praise of sycophants, but on the respect of the wise and the good. Let innocence preside over your enjoyments. Let usefulness and beneficence, not ostentation and vanity, direct the train of your pursuits. Let *your alms, together with your prayers, come up in memorial before God.* So shall your prosperity, under the blessing of Heaven, be *as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* So shall it resemble those celestial fires which glow above, with beneficent, with regular, and permanent lustre; and not prove that *mirth of fools*, which by Solomon is compared to *the crackling of thorns under a pot*, a glittering and fervent blaze, but speedily extinct.

On the whole, let this be our conclusion, that, both in prosperity and in adversity, religion is the safest guide of human life. Conducted by its light, we reap the pleasures, and at the same time escape the dangers of a prosperous state. Sheltered under its protection, we stand the shock of adversity with most intrepidity, and suffer least from the violence of the storm. *He that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from guile. Let him depart from evil, and do good. Let him seek peace with God, and pursue it.* Then, in his adversity, *God shall hide him in his pavilion.* In his prosperity, *he shall flourish like a tree planted by the rivers of water. The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff*, light and vile, *which the wind driveth away.*

SERMON IV.

On our imperfect Knowledge of a Future State.

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass darkly.

THE Apostle here describes the imperfection of our knowledge with relation to spiritual and eternal objects. He employs two metaphors to represent more strongly the disadvantages under which we lie: One, that we see those objects *through a glass*, that is, through the intervention of a medium which obscures their glory; the other, that we see them *in a riddle* or enigma, which our translators have rendered by seeing them *darkly;* that is, the truth in part is discovered, in part concealed, and placed beyond our comprehension.

This description, however just and true, cannot fail to occasion some perplexity to an inquiring mind. For it may seem strange, that so much darkness should be left upon those celestial objects, towards which we are at the same time commanded to aspire. We are strangers in the universe of God. Confined to that spot on which we dwell, we are permitted to know nothing of what is transacting in the regions above us and around us. By much labour, we acquire a superficial acquaintance with a few sensible objects which we find in our present habitation; but we enter, and we depart,

under a total ignorance of the nature and laws of the spiritual world. One subject in particular, when our thoughts proceed in this train, must often recur upon the mind with peculiar anxiety; that is, the immortality of the soul, and the future state of man. Exposed as we are at present to such variety of afflictions, and subjected to so much disappointment in all our pursuits of happiness, Why, it may be said, has our gracious Creator denied us the consolation of a full discovery of our future existence, if indeed such an existence be prepared for us?—Reason, it is true, suggests many arguments in behalf of immortality: Revelation gives full assurance of it. Yet even that Gospel, which is said to have *brought life and immortality to light*, allows us to *see only through a glass darkly. It doth not yet appear what we shall be.* Our knowledge of a future world is very imperfect; our ideas of it are faint and confused. It is not displayed in such a manner as to make an impression suited to the importance of the object. The faith even of the best men is much inferior both in clearness and in force, to the evidence of sense; and proves on many occasions insufficient to counterbalance the temptations of the present world. Happy moments indeed there sometimes are in the lives of pious men, when sequestered from worldly cares, and borne up on the wings of divine contemplation, they rise to a near and transporting view of immortal glory. But such efforts of the mind are rare, and cannot be long supported. When the spirit of meditation subsides, this lively sense of a future state decays; and though the general belief of it remain, yet even good men, when they return to

the ordinary business and cares of life, seem to rejoin the multitude, and to re-assume the same hopes, and fears, and interests, which influence the rest of the world.

From such reflections a considerable difficulty respecting this important subject, either arises, or seems to arise. Was such an obscure and imperfect discovery of another life worthy to proceed from God? Does it not afford some ground, either to tax his goodness, or to suspect the evidence of its coming from him? — This is the point which we are now to consider; and let us consider it with that close attention which the subject merits. Let us inquire, whether we have any reason, either to complain of Providence, or to object to the evidence of a future state, because that evidence is not of a more sensible and striking nature. Let us attempt humbly to trace the reasons why; though permitted to know and to see somewhat of the eternal world, we are nevertheless permitted only to *know in part and to see through a glass, darkly.*

It plainly appears to be the plan of the Deity, in all his dispensations, to mix light with darkness, evidence with uncertainty. Whatever the reasons of this procedure be, the fact is undeniable. He is described in the Old Testament as *a God that hideth himself.** *Clouds and darkness* are said to *surround him. His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; his footsteps are not known.* Both the works and the ways of God are full of mystery. In the ordinary course of his government, innumerable

* Isaiah, xlv. 15.

events occur which perplex us to the utmost. There is a certain limit to all our inquiries of religion, beyond which if we attempt to proceed, we are lost in a maze of inextricable difficulties. Even that revelation which affords such material instruction to man, concerning his duty and his happiness, leaves many doubts unresolved. Why it was not given sooner; why not to all men; why there should be so many things in it *hard to be understood;* are difficulties not inconsiderable, in the midst of that incontestible evidence by which it is supported. If then, the future state of man be not placed in so full and clear a light as we desire, this is no more than what the analogy of all religion, both natural and revealed, gave us reason to expect.

But such a solution of the difficulty will be thought imperfect. It may, perhaps, not give much satisfaction to show, that all religion abounds with difficulties of a like nature. Our situation, it will be said, is so much the more to be lamented, that not on one side only we are confined in our inquiries, but on all hands environed with mysterious obscurity. — Let us then, if so much dissatisfied with our condition, give scope for once to Fancy, and consider how the plan of Providence might be rectified to our wish. Let us call upon the Sceptic, and desire him to say, what measure of information would afford him entire satisfaction.

This, he will tell us, requires not any long or deep deliberation. He desires only to have his view enlarged beyond the limits of this corporeal state. Instead of resting upon evidence which requires discussion, which must be supported by much reasoning, and which, after all, he alleges, yields very

imperfect information, he demands the everlasting mansions to be so displayed, if in truth such mansions there be, as to place faith on a level with the evidence of sense. What noble and happy effects, he exclaims, would instantly follow, if man thus beheld his present and his future existence at once before him! He would then become worthy of his rank in the creation. Instead of being the sport, as now, of degrading passions and childish attachments, he would act solely on the principles of immortality. His pursuit of virtue would be steady; his life would be undisturbed and happy. Superiour to the attacks of distress, and to the solicitations of pleasure, he would advance, by a regular process, towards those divine rewards and honours which were continually present to his view. —— Thus Fancy, with as much ease and confidence as if it were a perfect judge of creation, erects a new world to itself, and exults with admiration of its own work. But let us pause, and suspend this admiration, till we coolly examine the consequences that would follow from this supposed reformation of the universe.

Consider the nature and circumstances of man. Introduced into the world in an indigent condition, he is supported at first by the care of others; and, as soon as he begins to act for himself, finds labour and industry to be necessary for sustaining his life, and supplying his wants. Mutual defence and interest gives rise to society; and society, when formed, requires distinctions of property, diversity of conditions, subordinations of ranks, and a multiplicity of occupations, in order to advance the general good. The services of the poor, and the protection of the

rich, become reciprocally necessary. The governours, and the governed, must co-operate for general safety. Various arts must be studied; some respecting the cultivation of the mind, others the care of the body; some to ward off the evils, and some to provide the conveniencies of life. In a word, by the destination of his Creator, and the necessities of his nature, man commences, at once, an active, not merely a contemplative being. Religion assumes him as such. It supposes him employed in this world, as on a busy stage. It regulates, but does not abolish, the enterprises and cares of ordinary life. It addresses itself to the various ranks in society; to the rich and the poor, to the magistrate and the subject. It rebukes the slothful; directs the diligent how to labour; and requires every man to *do his own business.*

Suppose, now, that veil to be withdrawn which conceals another world from our view. Let all obscurity vanish; let us no longer *see darkly, as through a glass;* but let every man enjoy that intuitive perception of divine and eternal objects which the Sceptic was supposed to desire. The immediate effect of such a discovery would be, to annihilate in our eye all human objects, and to produce a total stagnation in the affairs of the world. Were the celestial glory exposed to our admiring view; did the angelic harmony sound in our enraptured ears; what earthly concerns would have the power of engaging our attention for a single moment? All the studies and pursuits, the arts and labours which now employ the activity of man, which support the order, or promote the happiness of society, would lie neglected and abandoned. Those desires and fears, those hopes and interests, by which we are at present

stimulated, would cease to operate. Human life would present no objects sufficient to rouse the mind; to kindle the spirit of enterprise, or to urge the hand of industry. If the mere sense of duty engaged a good man to take some part in the business of the world, the task, when submitted to, would prove distasteful. Even the preservation of life would be slighted, if he were not bound to it by the authority of God. Impatient of his confinement within this tabernacle of dust, languishing for the happy day of his translation to those glorious regions which were displayed to his sight, he would sojourn on earth as a melancholy exile. Whatever Providence has prepared for the entertainment of man, would be viewed with contempt. Whatever is now attractive in society would appear insipid. In a word, he would be no longer a fit inhabitant of this world, nor be qualified for those exertions which are allotted to him in his present sphere of being. But, all his faculties being sublimated above the measure of humanity, he would be in the condition of a being of superiour order, who, obliged to reside among men, would regard their pursuits with scorn, as dreams, trifles, and puerile amusements of a day.

But to this reasoning it may perhaps be replied, that such consequences as I have now stated, supposing them to follow, deserve not much regard.—For what though the present arrangement of human affairs were entirely changed, by a clearer view, and a stronger impression of our future state? Would not such a change prove the highest blessing to man? Is not his attachment to worldly objects the great source both of his misery and his guilt? Employed in perpetual contemplation of heavenly objects, and

in preparation for the enjoyment of them, would he not become more virtuous, and of course more happy, than the nature of his present employments and attachments permits him to be?—Allowing for a moment the consequence to be such, this much is yielded, that, upon the supposition which was made, man would not be the creature which he now is, nor human life the state which we now behold. How far the change would contribute to his welfare, comes to be considered.

If there be any principle fully ascertained by religion, it is, That this life was intended for a state of trial and improvement to man. His preparation for a better world required a gradual purification carried on by steps of progressive discipline. The situation, therefore, here assigned him, was such as to answer this design, by calling forth all his active powers, by giving full scope to his moral dispositions, and bringing to light his whole character. Hence it became proper, that difficulty and temptation should arise in the course of his duty. Ample rewards were promised to virtue; but these rewards were left, as yet, in obscurity and distant prospect. The impressions of sense were so balanced against the discoveries of immortality, as to allow a conflict between faith and sense, between conscience and desire, between present pleasure and future good. In this conflict, the souls of good men are tried, improved, and strengthened. In this field, their honours are reaped. Here are formed the capital virtues of fortitude, temperance, and self-denial; moderation in prosperity, patience in adversity, submission to the will of God, and charity and forgiveness to men, amidst the various competitions of worldly interest.

Such is the plan of Divine wisdom for man's improvement. But put the case that the plans devised by human wisdom were to take place, and that the rewards of the just were to be more fully displayed to view; the exercise of all those graces which I have mentioned, would be entirely superseded. Their very names would be unknown. Every temptation being withdrawn, every worldly attachment being subdued by the overpowering discoveries of eternity, no trial of sincerity, no discrimination of characters, would remain; no opportunity would be afforded for those active exertions, which are the means of purifying and perfecting the good. On the competition between time and eternity, depends the chief exercise of human virtue. The obscurity which at present hangs over eternal objects, preserves the competition. Remove that obscurity, and you remove human virtue from its place. You overthrow that whole system of discipline, by which imperfect creatures are, in this life, gradually trained up for a more perfect state.

This, then, is the conclusion to which at last we arrive: That the full display which was demanded, of the heavenly glory, would be so far from improving the human soul, that it would abolish those virtues and duties which are the great instruments of its improvement. It would be unsuitable to the character of man in every view, either as an active being, or a moral agent. It would disqualify him for taking part in the affairs of the world; for relishing the pleasures, or for discharging the duties of life: In a word, it would entirely defeat the purpose of his being placed on this earth; and the

question, Why the Almighty has been pleased to leave a spiritual world, and the future existence of man under so much obscurity, resolves in the end into this, Why there should be such a creature as man in the universe of God?—Such is the issue of the improvements proposed to be made on the plans of Providence. They add to the discoveries of the superiour wisdom of God, and of the presumption and folly of man.

From what has been said, it now appears, That no reasonable objection to the belief of a future state arises from the imperfect discoveries of it which we enjoy; from the difficulties that are mingled with its evidence; from our *seeing as through a glass, darkly, and being* left to *walk by faith, and not by sight.* It cannot be otherwise, it ought not to be otherwise, in our present state. The evidence which is afforded, is sufficient for the conviction of a candid mind, sufficient for a rational ground of conduct; though not so striking as to withdraw our attention from the present world, or altogether to overcome the impression of sensible objects. In such evidence, it becomes us to acquiesce, without indulging either doubts or complaints, on account of our not receiving all the satisfaction which we fondly desire, but which our present immaturity of being excludes. For, upon the supposition of immortality, this life is no other than the childhood of existence; and the measures of our knowledge must be proportioned to such a state. To the successive stages of human life, from infancy to old age, belong certain peculiar attachments, certain cares, desires, and interests;

which open not abruptly, but by gradual advances on the mind, as it becomes fit to receive them, and is prepared for acting the part to which, in their order, they pertain. Hence, in the education of a child, no one thinks of inspiring him all at once with the knowledge, the sentiments, and views of a man, and with contempt for the exercises and amusements of childhood. On the contrary, employments suited to his age are allowed to occupy him. By these his powers are gradually unfolded; and advantage is taken of his youthful pursuits, to improve and strengthen his mind; till, step by step, he is led on to higher prospects, and prepared for a larger and more important scene of action.

This analogy, which so happily illustrates the present conduct of the Deity towards man, deserves attention the more, as it is the very illustration used by the Apostle, when treating of this subject in the context. *Now*, says he, *we know in part—but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: Now I know in part; but then, I shall know even as I am known.* Under the care of the Almighty, our education is now going on, from a mortal to an immortal state. As much light is let in upon us, as we can bear without injury. When the objects become too splendid and dazzling for our sight, the curtain is drawn. Exercised in such a field of action, as suits the strength of our unripened powers, we are, at the same time, by proper prospects and hopes, prompted to aspire

towards the manhood of our nature, the time when *childish things shall be put away*. But still, betwixt those future prospects, and the impression of present objects, such an accurate proportion is established, as on the one hand shall not produce a total contempt of earthly things, while we aspire to those that are heavenly; and on the other, shall not encourage such a degree of attachment to our present state, as would render us unworthy of future advancement. In a word, the whole course of things is so ordered, that we neither, by an irregular and precipitate education, become men too soon; nor by a fond and trifling indulgence, be suffered to continue children for ever.

Let these reflections not only remove the doubts which may arise from our obscure knowledge of immortality, but likewise produce the highest admiration of the wisdom of our Creator. The structure of the natural world affords innumerable instances of profound design, which no attentive spectator can survey without wonder in the moral world, where the workmanship is of much finer and more delicate contexture, subjects of still greater admiration open to view. But admiration must rise to its highest point, when those parts of the moral constitution, which at first were reputed blemishes, which carried the appearance of objections, either to the wisdom or the goodness of Providence, are discovered, on more accurate inspection, to be adjusted with the most exquisite propriety. We have now seen that the darkness of man's condition is no less essential to his well-being, than the light which he enjoys. His internal powers, and his external situation, appear to be exactly fitted to each

other. Those complaints which we are apt to make, of our limited capacity and narrow views, of our inability to penetrate farther into the future destination of man, are found, from the foregoing observations, to be just as unreasonable, as the childish complaints of our not being formed with a microscopic eye, nor furnished with an eagle's wing; that is, of not being endowed with powers which would subvert the nature, and counteract the laws of our present state.

In order to do justice to the subject, I must observe, that the same reasoning which has been now employed with respect to our knowledge of immortality, is equally applicable to many other branches of intellectual knowledge. Thus, why we are permitted to know so little of the nature of that Eternal Being who rules the universe; why the manner in which he operates on the natural and moral world, is wholly concealed; why we are kept in such ignorance with respect to the extent of his works, to the nature and agency of spiritual beings, and even with respect to the union between our own soul and body: To all these, and several other inquiries of the same kind, which often employ the solicitous researches of speculative men, the answer is the same that was given to the interesting question which makes the subject of our discourse. The degree of knowledge desired, would prove incompatible with the design, and with the proper business of this life. It would raise us to a sphere too exalted; would reveal objects too great and striking for our present faculties; would excite feelings too strong for us to bear; in a word, would unfit us for thinking or acting like human creatures. It is therefore reserved for a more

advanced period of our nature; and the hand of Infinite wisdom hath in mercy drawn a veil over scenes which would overpower the sight of mortals.

One instance, in particular, of Divine wisdom is so illustrious, and corresponds so remarkably with our present subject, that I cannot pass it over without notice; that is, the concealment under which Providence has placed the future events of our life on earth. The desire of penetrating into this unknown region, has ever been one of the most anxious passions of men. It has often seized the wise as well as the credulous, and given rise to many vain and impious superstitions throughout the whole earth. Burning with curiosity at the approach of some critical event, and impatient under the perplexity of conjecture and doubt, How cruel is Providence, we are apt to exclaim, in denying to man the power of foresight, and in limiting him to the knowledge of the present moment! Were he permitted to look forward into the course of destiny, how much more suitably would he be prepared for the various turns and changes in his life? With what moderation would he enjoy his prosperity under the fore-knowledge of an approaching reverse? And with what eagerness be prompted to improve the flying hours, by seeing the inevitable term draw nigh which was to finish his course?

But while fancy indulges such vain desires, and criminal complaints, this coveted fore-knowledge must clearly appear to the eye of Reason, to be the most fatal gift which the Almighty could bestow. If, in this present mixed state, all the successive scenes of distress through which we are to pass, were laid before us in one view, perpetual sadness would

overcast our life. Hardly would any transient gleams of intervening joy be able to force their way through the cloud. Faint would be the relish of pleasures of which we foresaw the close: Insupportable the burden of afflictions, under which we were oppressed by a load not only of present, but of an anticipated sorrow. Friends would begin their union, with lamenting the day which was to dissolve it; and, with weeping eye, the parent would every moment behold the child whom he knew that he was to lose. In short, as soon as that mysterious veil, which now covers futurity, was lifted up, all the gaiety of life would disappear; its flattering hopes, its pleasing illusions, would vanish; and nothing but its vanity and sadness remain. The foresight of the hour of death would continually interrupt the course of human affairs, and the overwhelming prospect of the future, instead of exciting men to proper activity, would render them immoveable with consternation and dismay.—— How much more friendly to man is that mixture of knowledge and ignorance which is allotted to him in this state! Ignorant of the events which are to befall us, and of the precise term which is to conclude our life, by this ignorance our enjoyment of present objects is favoured; and knowing that death is certain, and that human affairs are full of change, by this knowledge our attachment to those objects is moderated. Precisely in the same manner, as by the mixture of evidence and obscurity which remains on the prospect of a future state, a proper balance is preserved betwixt our love of this life, and our desire of a better.

The longer that our thoughts dwell on this subject, the more we must be convinced, that in nothing the

Divine wisdom is more admirable, than in proportioning knowledge to the necessities of man. Instead of lamenting our condition, that we are permitted only to *see as through a glass darkly*, we have reason to bless our Creator, no less for what he hath concealed, than for what he hath allowed us to know. He *is wonderful in counsel, as he is excellent in working. He is wise in heart, and his thoughts are deep. How unsearchable are the riches of the wisdom of the knowledge of God!*

From the whole view which we have taken of the subject, this important instruction arises, that the great design of all the knowledge, and in particular of the religious knowledge which God hath afforded us, is, to fit us for discharging the duties of life. No useless discoveries are made to us in religion: No discoveries even of useful truths, beyond the precise degree of information, which is subservient to right conduct. To this great end all our information points. In this centre all the lines of knowledge meet. *Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel;* yet not so displayed as to gratify the curiosity of the world with an astonishing spectacle; but only so far made known, as to assist and support us in the practice of our duty. If the discovery were more imperfect, it would excite no desire of immortality; if it were more full and striking, it would render us careless of life. On the first supposition, no sufficient motive to virtue would appear; on the second, no proper trial of it would remain. In the one case, we should think and act like men who *have their portion only in this world;* in the other case, like men who have no concern with this world at

all. Whereas now, by the wise constitution of Heaven, we are placed in the most favourable situation for acting, with propriety, our allotted part here; and for rising, in due course, to higher honour and happiness hereafter.

Let us then second the kind intentions of Providence, and act upon the plan which it hath pointed out. Checking our inquisitive solicitude about what the Almighty hath concealed, let us diligently improve what he hath made known. Inhabitants of the earth, we are at the same time candidates for Heaven. Looking upon these as only different views of one consistent character, let us carry on our preparation for Heaven, not by abstracting ourselves from the concerns of this world, but by fulfilling the duties and offices of every station in life. Living *soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world,* let us *look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Before I conclude, it may be proper to observe, That the reasonings in this discourse give no ground to apprehend any danger of our being too much influenced by the belief of a future state. I have shown the hurtful effects which would follow from too bright and full a discovery of the glory of that state; and in showing this, I have justified the decree of Providence, which permits no such discovery. But as our nature is at present constituted, attached by so many strong connexions to the world of sense, and enjoying a communication so feeble and distant with the world of spirits, we need fear no danger from cultivating intercourse with the latter as much as possible. On the contrary, from that intercourse the chief security of our virtue is to be sought. The

bias of our nature leans so much towards sense, that from this side the peril is to be dreaded, and on this side the defence is to be provided.

Let us then *walk by faith.* Let us strengthen this principle of action to the utmost of our power. Let us implore the Divine grace, to strengthen it within us more and more: That we may thence derive an antidote against that subtle poison, which incessant commerce with the objects of sense diffuses through our souls; that we may hence acquire purity and dignity of manners suited to our divine hopes; and undefiled by the pleasures of the world, unshaken by its terrours, may preserve to the end one constant tenour of integrity. Till at last, having under the conduct of Christian faith happily finished the period of discipline, we enter on that state, where a far nobler scene shall open; where eternal objects shall shine in their native splendour; where this twilight of mortal life being past, the *Sun of righteousness* shall rise; and, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

SERMON V.

On the Death of Christ.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

JOHN, xvii. 1.

Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father! the hour is come.

THESE were the words of our blessed Lord on a memorable occasion. The feast of the passover drew nigh, at which he knew that he was to suffer. The night was arrived wherein he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. He had spent the evening in conference with his disciples; like a dying father in the midst of his family, mingling consolations with his last instructions. When he had ended his discourse to them, he *lifted up his eyes to heaven*, and with the words which I have now read, began that solemn prayer of intercession for the church, which closed his ministry. Immediately after, he went forth with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemanè, and surrendered himself to those who came to apprehend him.

Such was the situation of our Lord at the time of his pronouncing these words. He saw his mission on the point of being accomplished. He had the prospect full before him, of all that he was about to suffer—*Father! the hour is come.*—What hour? An hour the most critical, the most pregnant with

great events, since hours had begun to be numbered, since time had begun to run. It was the hour in which the Son of God was to terminate the labours of his important life, by a death still more important and illustrious; the hour of atoning, by his sufferings, for the guilt of mankind; the hour of accomplishing prophecies, types, and symbols, which had been carried on through a series of ages; the hour of concluding the old, and of introducing to the world the new dispensation of religion; the hour of his triumphing over the world, and death, and hell; the hour of his erecting that spiritual kingdom which is to last for ever. Such is the hour. Such are the events, which you are to commemorate in the sacrament of our Lord's Supper. I shall attempt to set them before you as proper subjects, at this time, of your devout meditation. To display them in their genuine majesty, is beyond the ability of man.

I. This was the hour in which Christ was glorified by his sufferings. The whole of his life had discovered much real greatness, under a mean appearance. Through the cloud of his humiliation, his native lustre often broke forth; but never did it shine so bright, as in this last, this trying hour. It was indeed the hour of distress, and of blood. He knew it to be such; and when he uttered the words of the Text, he had before his eyes, the executioner and the cross, the scourge, the nails, and the spear. But by prospects of this nature his soul was not to be overcome. It is distress which ennobles every great character; and distress was to glorify the Son of God. He was now to teach all mankind by his example, how to suffer and to die. He was to stand

forth before his enemies, as the faithful witness of the truth; justifying by his behaviour the character which he assumed, and sealing with his blood the doctrine which he taught.

What magnanimity in all his words and actions on this great occasion! The court of Herod, the judgment-hall of Pilate, the hill of Calvary, were so many theatres prepared for his displaying all the virtues of a constant and patient mind. When led forth to suffer, the first voice which we hear from him, is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty, country; and, to the last moment of his life, we behold him in possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. No upbraiding, no complaining expression escaped from his lips, during the long and painful approaches of a cruel death. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or a vulgar, of a discomposed or impatient mind. With the utmost attention of filial tenderness, he committed his aged mother to the care of his beloved disciple.* With all the dignity of a sovereign, he conferred pardon on a penitent fellow-sufferer. With a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood.

By wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, was this hour distinguished. All nature seemed to feel it; and the dead and the living bore witness to its importance. The veil of the temple was *rent in twain*. The earth shook. There was darkness over all the land. The graves were opened, and *many who slept arose, and went into the Holy City*. Nor were

* John, xix. 26, 27.

these the only prodigies of this awful hour. The most hardened hearts were subdued and changed. The judge who, in order to gratify the multitude, passed sentence against him, publicly attested his innocence. The Roman centurion who presided at the execution, *glorified God*, and acknowledged the sufferer to be more than man. *After he saw the things which had passed, he said, Certainly this was a righteous person; truly this was the Son of God.* The Jewish malefactor who was crucified with him, addressed him as a King, and implored his favour. Even the crowd of insensible spectators, who had come forth as to a common spectacle, and who began with clamours and insults, *returned home, smiting their breasts.* — Look back on the heroes, the philosophers, the legislators of old. View them in their last moments. Recall every circumstance which distinguished their departure from the world. Where can you find such an assemblage of high virtues, and of great events, as concurred at the death of Christ? Where so many testimonies given to the dignity of the dying person, by earth and by heaven?

II. This was the hour in which Christ atoned for the sins of mankind, and accomplished our eternal redemption. It was the hour when that great sacrifice was offered up, the efficacy of which reaches back to the first transgression of man, and extends forward to the end of time; the hour when, from the cross, as from an high altar, the blood was flowing, which washed away the guilt of the nations.

This awful dispensation of the Almighty contains mysteries which are beyond the discovery of man. It is one of those things into which *the Angels desire to*

look. What has been revealed to us is, That the death of Christ was the interposition of Heaven for preventing the ruin of human kind. We know, that, under the government of God, misery is the natural consequence of guilt. After rational creatures had, by their criminal conduct, introduced disorder into the Divine kingdom, there was no ground to believe, that by their penitence and prayers alone they could prevent the destruction which threatened them. The prevalence of propitiatory sacrifices throughout the earth, proclaims it to be the general sense of mankind, that mere repentance was not of sufficient avail to expiate sin or to stop its penal effects. By the constant allusions which are carried on in the New Testament to the sacrifices under the Law, as pre-signifying a great atonement made by Christ; and by the strong expressions which are used in describing the effects of his death, the sacred writers show, as plainly as language allows, that there was an efficacy in his sufferings, far beyond that of mere example and instruction. The nature and extent of that efficacy, we are unable, as yet, fully to trace. Part we are capable of beholding; and the wisdom of what we behold, we have reason to adore. We discern in this plan of redemption, the evil of sin strongly exhibited; and the justice of the Divine government awfully exemplified, in Christ suffering for sinners. But let us not imagine, that our present discoveries unfold the whole influence of the death of Christ. It is connected with causes into which we cannot penetrate. It produces consequences too extensive for us to explore. *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts*. In all things we *see only in part*;

and here, if any where, we see also *as through a glass, darkly*.

This, however, is fully manifest, that redemption is one of the most glorious works of the Almighty. If the hour of the creation of the world was great and illustrious; that hour, when, from the dark and formless mass, this fair system of nature arose at the Divine command; when *the morning stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for joy*; no less illustrious is the hour of the restoration of the world; the hour when, from condemnation and misery, it emerged into happiness and peace. With less external majesty it was attended, but is, on that account, the more wonderful, that, under an appearance so simple, such great events were covered.

III. In this hour the long series of prophecies, visions, types, and figures, was accomplished. This was the centre in which they all met: This the point towards which they had tended and verged, throughout the course of so many generations. You behold the Law and the Prophets standing, if we may speak so, at the foot of the cross, and doing homage. You behold Moses and Aaron bearing the ark of the covenant; David and Elijah presenting the oracle of testimony. You behold all the priests and sacrifices, all the rites and ordinances, all the types and symbols assembled together to receive their consummation. Without the death of Christ, the worship and ceremonies of the Law would have remained a pompous, but unmeaning institution. In the hour when he was crucified, *the book with the seven seals* was opened. Every rite assumed its significancy; every predic-

tion met its event; every symbol displayed its correspondence.

The dark, and seemingly ambiguous, method of conveying important discoveries under figures and emblems, was not peculiar to the sacred books. The spirit of God, in pre-signifying the death of Christ, adopted that plan, according to which the whole knowledge of those early ages was propagated through the world. Under the veil of mysterious allusion, all wisdom was then concealed. From the sensible world, images were every-where borrowed, to describe things unseen. More was understood to be meant than was openly expressed. By enigmatical rites, the Priest communicated his doctrines; by parables and allegories, the Philosopher instructed his disciples; even the Legislator, by figurative sayings, commanded the reverence of the people. Agreeably to this prevailing mode of instruction, the whole dispensation of the Old Testament was so conducted, as to be the shadow and the figure of a spiritual system. Every remarkable event, every distinguished personage, under the Law, is interpreted in the New Testament, as bearing some reference to the hour of which we treat. If Isaac was laid upon the altar as an innocent victim; if David was driven from his throne by the wicked, and restored by the hand of God; if the brazen serpent was lifted up to heal the people; if the rock was smitten by Moses, to furnish drink in the wilderness; all were types of Christ, and alluded to his death.

In predicting the same event the language of ancient prophecy was magnificent, but seemingly contradictory: For it foretold a Messiah, who was to be at once a sufferer and a conqueror. *The Star*

was to come out of Jacob, and the Branch to spring from the stem of Jesse. The Angel of the Covenant, the desire of all Nations, was to come suddenly to his temple; and to him was to be *the gathering of the people.* Yet, at the same time, he was to be *despised and rejected of men;* he was to be *taken from prison and from judgment,* and to be *led as a lamb to the slaughter.* Though he was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,* yet *the Gentiles were to come to his light, and Kings to the brightness of his rising.* In the hour when Christ died, those prophetical riddles were solved; those seeming contradictions were reconciled. The obscurity of oracles, and the ambiguity of types, vanished. The *sun of righteousness* rose; and, together with the dawn of religion, those shadows passed away.

IV. This was the hour of the abolition of the Law, and the introduction of the Gospel; the hour of terminating the old and of beginning the new dispensation of religious knowledge and worship throughout the earth. Viewed in this light, it forms the most august æra which is to be found in the history of mankind. When Christ was suffering on the cross, we are informed by one of the Evangelists, that he said, *I thirst;* and that they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. *After he had tasted the vinegar, knowing that all things were now accomplished, and the scriptures fulfilled, he said, It is finished;* * that is, This offered draught of vinegar was the last circumstance predicted by an ancient Prophet, † that remained to be fulfilled.

* John, xix. 28, 29, 30. † Psalm lxix. 22.

The vision and the prophecy are now sealed: The Mosaic dispensation is closed. *And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.*

It is finished—When he uttered these words, he changed the state of the universe. At that moment the Law ceased, and the Gospel commenced. This was the ever-memorable point of time which separated the old and the new world from each other. On one side of the point of separation, you behold the Law, with its priests, its sacrifices, and its rites, retiring from sight. On the other side, you behold the Gospel, with its simple and venerable institutions, coming forward into view. Significantly was the veil of the temple rent in this hour; for the glory then departed from between the cherubims. The legal High Priest delivered up his Urim and Thummim, his breast-plate, his robes, and his incense: And CHRIST stood forth as the great High Priest of all succeeding generations. By that one sacrifice, which he now offered, he abolished sacrifices for ever. Altars on which the fire had blazed for ages, were now to smoke no more. Victims were no more to bleed. *Not with the blood of bulls and goats but with his own blood he now entered into the Holy Place, there to appear in the presence of God for us.*

This was the hour of association and union to all the worshippers of God. When Christ said, *It is finished*, he threw down the wall of partition which had so long divided the Gentile from the Jew. He gathered into one, all the faithful out of every kindred and people. He proclaimed the hour to be come, when the knowledge of the true God should be no longer confined to one nation, nor his worship to one temple; but over all the earth, the wor-

shippers of the Father should *serve him in spirit and in truth.* From that hour they who dwelt in the *uttermost ends of the earth, strangers to the covenant of promise,* began to be *brought nigh.* In that hour the light of the Gospel dawned from afar on the British Islands.

During a long course of ages, Providence seemed to be occupied in preparing the world for this revolution. The whole Jewish œconomy was intended to usher it in. The knowledge of God was preserved unextinguished in one corner of the world, that thence, in due time, might issue forth the light which was to overspread the earth. Successive revelations gradually enlarged the views of men beyond the narrow bounds of Judæa, to a more extensive kingdom of God. Signs and miracles awakened their expectation, and directed their eyes towards this great event. Whether God descended on the flaming mountain, or spoke by the Prophet's voice; whether he scattered his chosen people into captivity or re-assembled them in their own land; he was still carrying on a progressive plan, which was accomplished at the death of Christ.

Not only in the territories of Israel, but over all the earth, the great dispensations of Providence respected the approach of this important hour. If empires rose or fell; if war divided, or peace united the nations; if learning civilized their manners, or philosophy enlarged their views; all was, by the secret decree of Heaven, made to ripen the world for that *fullness of time,* when Christ was to publish the whole counsel of God. The Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman conqueror, entered upon the stage each at his predicted period; and

though he meant not so, neither did his heart think so, ministered to this hour. The revolutions of power, and the succession of monarchies, were so arranged by Providence, as to facilitate the progress of the Gospel through the habitable world, after the day had arrived, *when the stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands, should become a great mountain, and fill the earth.* * This was the day which *Abraham saw afar off, and was glad.* This was the day which *many Prophets and Kings, and righteous men, desired to see, but could not;* the day for which *the earnest expectation of the creature,* long oppressed with ignorance, and bewildered in superstition, might be justly said *to wait.*

V. This was the hour of Christ's triumph over all the powers of darkness; the hour in which he overthrew dominions and thrones, *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* The contest which the kingdom of darkness had long maintained against the kingdom of light was now brought to its crisis. The period was come when *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.* For many ages, the most gross superstition had filled the earth. *The glory of the incorruptible God was* every-where, except in the land of Judæa, *changed into images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and beasts, and creeping things.* The world, which the Almighty created for himself, seemed to have become a temple of idols. Even to vices and passions altars were raised; and what was entitled Religion, was in effect a discipline of impurity. In the midst of this universal darkness, Satan had erected his throne;

* Dan. ii. 34, 35.

and the learned and polished, as well as the savage nations, bowed down before him. But at the hour when Christ appeared on the cross, the signal of his defeat was given. His kingdom suddenly departed from him; the reign of idolatry passed away: He was *beheld to fall like lightning from heaven.* In that hour the foundation of every Pagan temple shook. The statue of every false god tottered on its base. The Priest fled from his falling shrine; and the Heathen oracles became dumb for ever.

As on the cross Christ triumphed over Satan, so he overcame his auxiliary the world. Long had it assailed him with its temptations and discouragements. In this hour of severe trial, he surmounted them all. Formerly he had despised the pleasures of the world. He now baffled its terrours. Hence he is justly said to have *crucified the world.* By his sufferings he ennobled distress; and he darkened the lustre of the pomp and vanities of life. He discovered to his followers the path which leads, through affliction, to glory and to victory; and he imparted to them the same spirit which enabled him to overcome. *My kingdom is not of this world. In this world ye shall have tribulation: But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* *

Death also, the last foe of man, was the victim of this hour. The formidable appearance of the spectre remained; but his dart was taken away. For, in the hour when Christ expiated guilt, he disarmed death, by securing the resurrection of the just. When he said to his penitent fellow-sufferer, *To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise,* he announced to all

* John, xvi. 33. † Gen. iii. 24.

his followers the certainty of heavenly bliss. He declared *the cherubims* to be dismissed, and the *flaming sword* to be sheathed, which had been appointed at the fall, *to keep from man the way of the tree of life.* * Faint, before this period, had been the hope; indistinct the prospect, which even good men enjoyed of the heavenly kingdom. *Life and immortality were now brought to light.* From the hill of Calvary, the first clear and certain view was given to the world of the everlasting mansions. Since that hour, they have been the perpetual consolation of believers in Christ. Under trouble, they soothe their minds; amidst temptation, they support their virtue; and in their dying moments enable them to say, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?*

VI. THIS was the hour when our Lord erected that spiritual kingdom which is never to end. How vain are the counsels and designs of men! How shallow is the policy of the wicked! How short their triumphing! The enemies of Christ imagined that in this hour they had successfully accomplished their plan for his destruction. They believed, that they had entirely scattered the small party of his followers, and had extinguished his name and his honour for ever. In derision, they addressed him as a King. They clothed him with purple robes; they crowned him with a crown of thorns; they put a reed into his hand; and, with insulting mockery, bowed the knee before him. Blind and impious men! How little did they know that the Almighty was at that moment, *setting him as a King on the hill of Sion; giving him the Heathen for his inheritance, and the*

* Gen. iii. 24.

uttermost parts of the earth for his possession! How little did they know that their badges of mock royalty were at that moment converted into the signals of absolute dominion, and the instruments of irresistible power! The reed which they put into his hands became a *rod of iron*, with which he was to *break in pieces his enemies;* a sceptre, with which he was to rule the universe in righteousness. The cross, which they thought was to stigmatize him with infamy, became the ensign of his renown. Instead of being the reproach of his followers, it was to be their boast and their glory. The cross was to shine on palaces and churches, throughout the earth. It was to be assumed as the distinction of the most powerful monarchs, and to wave in the banner of victorious armies when the memory of Herod and Pilate should be accursed; when Jerusalem should be reduced to ashes, and the Jews be vagabonds over all the world.

These were the triumphs which commenced at this hour. Our Lord saw them already in their birth; he *saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied.* He beheld the word of God going forth, conquering, and to conquer; subduing, to the obedience of his laws, the subduers of the world; carrying light into the regions of darkness, and mildness into the habitations of cruelty. He beheld the Gentiles waiting below the cross, to receive the Gospel. He beheld *Ethiopia and the Isles stretching out their hands to God; the desert beginning to rejoice and to blossom as the rose; and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, as the waters cover the sea.* Well pleased, he said, *It is finished.* As a conqueror, he retired from the field, reviewing his triumphs: *He bowed*

his head and gave up the Ghost.—— From that hour Christ was no longer a mortal man, but *Head over all things to the Church;* the glorious King of men and angels, of whose dominion there shall be no end. His triumphs shall perpetually increase. *His name shall endure for ever; it shall last as long as the sun; men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.*

SUCH were the transactions, such the effects of this ever memorable hour. With all those great events was the mind of our Lord filled, when he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father! the hour is come.*

From this view which we have taken of this subject, permit me to suggest, what ground it affords to confide in the mercy of God for the pardon of sin; to trust to his faithfulness, for the accomplishment of all his promises; and to approach to him, with gratitude and devotion, in acts of worship.

IN the first place, the death of Christ affords us ground to confide in the Divine mercy for the pardon of sin. All the steps of that high dispensation of Providence, which we have considered, lead directly to this conclusion, *He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* *. This is the final result of the discoveries of the Gospel. On this rests that great system of consolation, which it hath reared up for men. We are not left to dubious and intricate reasonings, concerning the conduct which God may be expected to hold towards his offending

* Rom. viii. 32.

creatures: But we are led to the view of important and illustrious facts, which strike the mind with evidence irresistible. For is it possible to believe, that such great operations, as I have endeavoured to describe, were carried on by the Almighty in vain? Did he excite in the hearts of his creatures such encouraging hopes, without any intention to fulfil them? After so long a preparation of goodness, could he mean to deny forgiveness to the penitent and the humble? When, overcome by the sense of guilt, man looks up with an astonished eye to the justice of his Creator, let him recollect that hour of which the Text speaks, and be comforted. The signals of Divine mercy, erected in his view, are too conspicuous to be either distrusted or mistaken.

In the next place, the discoveries of this hour afford the highest reason to trust in the Divine faithfulness, for the accomplishment of every promise which remains yet unfulfilled. For this was the hour of the completion of God's ancient covenant.

It was the *performance of the mercy promised to the fathers.* We behold the consummation of a great plan, which, throughout a course of ages, had been uniformly pursued; and which, against every human appearance, was, at the appointed moment, exactly fulfilled. *No word that is gone out of the mouth of the Lord shall fail.* No length of time alters his purpose. No obstacles can retard it. Towards the ends accomplished in this hour, the most repugnant instruments were made to operate. We discern God bending to his purpose, the jarring passions, the opposite interests, and even the vices of men; uniting seeming contrarieties in his scheme; making *the*

wrath of man to praise him; obliging the ambition of Princes, the prejudices of the Jews, the malice of Satan, all to concur, either in bringing forward this hour, or in completing its destined effects. With what entire confidence ought we to wait for the fulfilment of all his other promises in their due time; even when events are most embroiled, and the prospect is most discouraging? *Although thou sayest, Thou canst not see him; yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.* Be attentive only to perform thy duty; leave the event to God; and be assured, that under the direction of his Providence, *all things shall work together* for a happy issue.

Lastly, the consideration of this whole subject tends to excite gratitude and devotion, when we approach to God in acts of worship. The hour of which I have discoursed, presents him to us in the amiable light of the Deliverer of mankind, the Restorer of our forfeited hopes. We behold the greatness of the Almighty, softened by the mild radiance of condescension and mercy. We behold him diminishing the awful distance at which we stand from his presence, by appointing for us a Mediator and Intercessor, through whom the humble may, without dismay, approach to Him who made them. By such views of the Divine nature, Christian faith lays the foundation for a worship which shall be at once rational and affectionate; a worship, in which the light of the understanding shall concur with the devotion of the heart, and the most profound reverence be united with the most cordial love. Christian faith is not a system of speculative truths. It is not a lesson of moral instruction only. By a train of high

discoveries which it reveals, by a succession of interesting objects which it places in our view, it is calculated to elevate the mind, to purify the affections, and, by the assistance of devotion, to confirm and encourage virtue. Such, in particular, is the scope of that Divine institution, the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. To this happy purpose, let it conduce, by concentering, in one striking point of light, all that the Gospel has displayed of what is most important to man. Touched with just contrition for past offences, and filled with a grateful sense of Divine goodness, let us come to the altar of God; and, with a humble faith in his infinite mercies, devote ourselves to his service for ever.

SERMON VI.

On Gentleness.

James, iii. 17.

The wisdom that is from above, is—gentle—

TO be wise in our own eyes, to be wise in the opinion of the world, and to be wise in the sight of God, are three things so very different, as rarely to coincide. One may often be wise in his own eyes, who is far from being so in the judgment of the world; and to be reputed a prudent man by the world, is no security for being accounted wise by God. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than disguised misery; as there are worldly honours, which in his estimation are reproach; so there is a worldly wisdom, which *in his sight is foolishness.* Of this worldly wisdom the characters are given in the context, and placed in contrast with those of the *wisdom which is from above.* The one is the wisdom of the crafty; the other that of the upright. The one terminates in selfishness; the other in charity. The one is *full of strife and bitter envyings;* the other, *of mercy and of good fruits.* One of the chief characters by which the wisdom from above is distinguished, is *gentleness,* of which I am now to discourse. Of this there is the greater occasion to discourse, because it is too seldom viewed in a religious light; and is more readily considered

by the bulk of men, as a mere felicity of nature, or an exterior accomplishment of manners, than as a Christian virtue, which they are bound to cultivate. I shall first explain the nature of this virtue; and shall then offer some arguments to recommend, and some directions to facilitate, the practice of it.

I BEGIN with distinguishing true gentleness from passive tameness of spirit, and from unlimited compliance with the manners of others. That passive tameness, which submits without struggle to every encroachment of the violent and assuming, forms no part of Christian duty; but, on the contrary, is destructive of general happiness and order. That unlimited complaisance, which, on every occasion, falls in with the opinions and manners of others, is so far from being a virtue, that it is itself a vice, and the parent of many vices. It overthrows all steadiness of principle; and produces that sinful conformity with the world which taints the whole character. In the present corrupted state of human manners, always to assent and to comply is the very worst maxim we can adopt. It is impossible to support the purity and dignity of Christian morals, without opposing the world on various occasions, even though we should stand alone. That gentleness, therefore, which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards, and the fawning assent of sycophants. It renounces no just right from fear. It gives up no important truth from flattery. It is indeed not only consistent with a firm mind, but it necessarily requires a manly spirit, and a fixed principle, in order to give it any real value. Upon this solid ground only, the polish of gentleness can with advantage be superinduced.

It stands opposed, not to the most determined regard for virtue and truth, but to harshness and severity, to pride and arrogance, to violence and oppression. It is, properly, that part of the great virtue of charity which makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. Compassion prompts us to relieve their wants. Forbearance prevents us from retaliating their injuries. Meekness restrains our angry passions; candour our severe judgments. Gentleness corrects whetever is offensive in our manners; and, by a constant train of humane attentions, studies to alleviate the burden of common misery. Its office, therefore, is extensive. It is not, like some other virtues, called forth on peculiar emergencies; but it is continually in action, when we are engaged in intercourse with men. It ought to form our address, to regulate our speech, and to diffuse itself over our whole behaviour.

I must warn you, however, not to confound this gentle *wisdom which is from above*, with that artificial courtesy, that studied smoothness of manners, which is learned in the school of the world. Such accomplishments, the most frivolous and empty may possess. Too often they are employed by the artful, as a snare; too often affected by the hard and unfeeling, as a cover to the baseness of their minds. We cannot, at the same time, avoid observing the homage which even in such instances the world is constrained to pay to virtue. In order to render society agreeable, it is found necessary to assume somewhat, that may at least carry its appearance. Virtue is the universal charm. Even its shadow is courted, when the substance is wanting. The imitation of its form has been reduced into an art; and, in the commerce

of life, the first study of all who would either gain the esteem or win the hearts of others, is to learn the speech, and to adopt the manners, of candour, gentleness, and humanity. But that gentleness which is the characteristic of a good man, has, like every other virtue, its seat in the heart: And let me add, nothing, except what flows from the heart, can render even external manners truly pleasing. For no assumed behaviour can at all times hide the real character. In that unaffected civility which springs from a gentle mind, there is a charm infinitely more powerful than in all the studied manners of the most finished courtier.

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises from reflection on our own failings and wants; and from just views of the condition, and the duty of man. It is native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which feels for every thing that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanour; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness towards friends, courtesy to strangers, long-suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation; administers reproof with tenderness; confers favours with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; is slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissension, and to restore peace. It neither intermeddles unnecessarily with the affairs, nor pries inquisitively into the secrets of others. It delights above

all things to alleviate distress, and if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to soothe at least the grieving heart. Where it has not the power of being useful, it is never burdensome. It seeks to please, rather than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care that superiority, either of talents or of rank, which is oppressive to those who are beneath it. In a word, it is that spirit and that tenour of manners, which the Gospel of Christ enjoins, when it commands us to *bear one another's burdens; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep; to please every one his neighbour for his good; to be kind and tender-hearted; to be pitiful and courteous; to support the weak, and to be patient towards all men.*

Having now sufficiently explained the nature of this amiable virtue, I proceed to recommend it to your practice. Let me, for this end, desire you to consider the duty which you owe to God; to consider the relation which you bear one to another; to consider your own interest.

I. Consider the duty which you owe to God. When you survey his works, nothing is so conspicuous as his greatness and majesty. When you consult his word, nothing is more remarkable than his attention to soften that greatness, and to place it in the mildest and least oppressive light. He not only characterizes himself as the *God of consolation*, but, with condescending gentleness, he particularly accommodates himself to the situation of the unfortunate. *He dwelleth with the humble and contrite. He hideth not his face when the afflicted cry. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.* — When his Son came to be the Saviour of the world, he was

eminent for the same attribute of mild and gentle goodness. Long before his birth, it was prophesied of him that he should *not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; that the bruised reed he should not break nor quench the smoking* * *flax:* And after his death, this distinguishing feature in his character was so universally remembered, that the Apostle Paul, on occasion of a request which he makes to the Corinthians, uses those remarkable expressions†, *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.* During all his intercourse with men, no harshness, or pride, or stately distance appeared in his demeanour. In his access he was easy; in his manners, simple; in his answers, mild; in his whole behaviour, humble and obliging. *Learn of me,* said he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.* — As the Son of God is the pattern, so the Holy Ghost is the inspirer of gentleness. His name is *the Comforter, the Spirit of Grace and Peace.* His *fruits* or operations on the human mind are *love, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering.* ‡ — Thus, by every discovery of the Godhead, honour is conferred upon gentleness. It is held up to our view, as peculiarly connected with Celestial Nature. And suitable to such discoveries, is the whole strain of the gospel. It were unnecessary to appeal to any single precept. You need only open the New Testament, to find this virtue perpetually inculcated. Charity, or love, is the capital figure ever presented to our view; and gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are the sounds ever recurring on our ear.

So predominant, indeed, is this spirit throughout

* Matth. xii. 19, 20. † 2 Cor. x. 1. ‡ Gal. v. 22.

the Christian dispensation, that even the vices and corruptions of men have not been able altogether to defeat its tendency. Though that dispensation is far from having hitherto produced its full effect upon the world, yet we can clearly trace its influence in humanizing the manners of men. Remarkable, in this respect, is the victory which it has gained over those powers of violence and cruelty which belong to the infernal kingdom. Wherever Christianity prevails, it has discouraged, and, in some degree, abolished slavery. It has rescued human nature from that ignominious yoke, under which, in former ages, the one half of mankind groaned. It has introduced more equality between the two sexes, and rendered the conjugal union more rational and happy. It has abated the ferociousness of war. It has mitigated the rigour of despotism, mitigated the cruelty of punishment; in a word, has reduced mankind from their ancient barbarity, into a more humane and gentle state. —— Do we pretend respect and zeal for this religion, and at the same time allow ourselves in that harshness and severity, which are so contradictory to its genius? Too plainly we show, that it has no power over our hearts. We may retain the Christian name; but we have abandoned the Christian spirit.

II. Consider the relation which you bear to one another. Man, as a solitary individual, is a very wretched being. As long as he stands detached from his kind, he is possessed, neither of happiness, nor of strength. We are formed by nature to unite; we are impelled towards each other, by the compassionate instincts in our frame; we are linked by a

thousand connections founded on common wants. Gentleness, therefore, or, as it is very properly termed, humanity, is what man, as such, in every station, owes to man. To be inaccessible, contemptuous, and hard of heart, is to revolt against our own nature; is, in the language of scripture, *to hide ourselves from our own flesh.* Accordingly, as all feel the claim which they have to mildness and humanity, so all are sensibly hurt by the want of it in others. On no side are we more vulnerable. No complaint is more feelingly made, than that of the harsh and rugged manners of persons with whom we have intercourse. But how seldom do we transfer the cause to ourselves, or examine how far we are guilty of inflicting on others, whose sensibility is the same with ours, those very wounds of which we so loudly complain?

But, perhaps, it will be pleaded by some, That this gentleness on which we now insist regards only those smaller offices of life, which in their eye are not essential to religion and goodness. Negligent they confess, on slight occasions, of the government of their temper, or the regulation of their behaviour, they are attentive, as they pretend, to the great duties of beneficence; and ready, whenever the opportunity presents, to perform important services to their fellow-creatures. But let such persons reflect, that the occasions of performing those important good deeds very rarely occur. Perhaps their situation in life, or the nature of their connections, may in a great measure exclude them from such opportunities. Great events give scope for great virtues; but the main tenour of human life is composed of small occurrences. Within the round of these, lie the ma-

terials of the happiness of most men; the subjects of their duty, and the trials of their virtue. Virtue must be formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily and repeated exertions. In order to its becoming either vigorous or useful, it must be habitually active; not breaking forth occasionally with a transient lustre, like the blaze of the comet; but regular in its returns, like the light of day: Not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense; but like the ordinary breeze, which purifies the air, and renders it healthful.

Years may pass over our heads, without affording any opportunity for acts of high beneficence or extensive utility. Whereas not a day passes, but in the common transactions of life, and especially in the intercourse of domestic society, gentleness finds place for promoting the happiness of others, and for strengthening in ourselves the habit of virtue. Nay, by seasonable discoveries of a humane spirit, we sometimes contribute more materially to the advancement of happiness, than by actions which are seemingly more important. There are situations, not a few, in human life, where the encouraging reception, the condescending behaviour, and the look of sympathy, bring greater relief to the heart than the most bountiful gift. While, on the other side, when the hand of liberality is extended to bestow, the want of gentleness is sufficient to frustrate the intention of the benefit. We sour those whom we mean to oblige; and by conferring favours with ostentation and harshness, we convert them into injuries. Can any disposition then be held to possess a low place in the scale of virtue, whose influence is so considerable on the happiness of the world?

Gentleness is, in truth, the great avenue to mutual enjoyment. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony. It softens animosities; renews endearments; and renders the countenance of man a refreshment to man. Banish gentleness from the earth; suppose the world to be filled with none but harsh and contentious spirits; and what sort of society would remain? the solitude of the desert were preferable to it. The conflict of jarring elements in chaos; the cave, where subterraneous winds contend and roar; the den, where serpents hiss, and beasts of the forest howl; would be the only proper representations of such assemblies of men. —*Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away, and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest: For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Mischief and sorrow are in the midst of it: Deceit and guile depart not from her streets.** —Strange! that where men have all one common interest, they should so often absurdly concur in defeating it! Has not nature already provided a sufficient quantity of unavoidable evils for the state of man? As if we did not suffer enough from the storm which beats upon us without, must we conspire also, in those societies where we assemble, in order to find a retreat from that storm, to harass one another?—But if the sense of duty, and of common happiness, be insufficient to recommend the virtue of which we treat, then let me desire you,

* Psalm lv. 6, 7, 8.

III. To consider your own interest. Whatever ends a good man can be supposed to pursue, gentleness will be found to favour them. It prepossesses and wins every heart. It persuades, when every other argument fails; often disarms the fierce, and melts the stubborn. Whereas harshness confirms the opposition it would subdue; and, of an indifferent person, creates an enemy. He who could overlook an injury committed in the collision of interest, will long and severely resent the slights of a contemptuous behaviour. — To the man of gentleness, the world is generally disposed to ascribe every other good quality. The higher endowments of the mind we admire at a distance, and when any impropriety of behaviour accompanies them, we admire without love. They are like some of the distant stars, whose beneficial influence reaches not to us. Whereas of the influence of gentleness, all in some degree partake, and therefore all love it. The man of this character rises in the world without struggle, and flourishes without envy. His misfortunes are universally lamented; and his failings are easily forgiven.

But whatever may be the effect of this virtue on our external condition, its influence on our internal enjoyment is certain and powerful. That inward tranquillity which it promotes, is the first requisite to every pleasurable feeling. It is the calm and clear atmosphere, the serenity and sunshine of the mind. When benignity and gentleness reign within, we are always least in hazard of being ruffled from without; every person, and every occurrence, are beheld in the most favourable light. But let some clouds of disgust and ill-humour gather on the mind; and immediately the scene changes. Nature seems transformed;

and the appearance of all things is blackened to our view. The gentle mind is like the smooth stream, which reflects every object in its just proportion, and in its fairest colours. The violent spirit, like troubled waters, renders back the images of things distorted and broken; and communicates to them all that disordered motion which arises solely from its own agitation.

Offences must come. As soon may the waves of the sea cease to roll, as provocations to arise from human corruption and frailty. Attacked by great injuries, the man of mild and gentle spirit will feel what human nature feels; and will defend and resent, as his duty allows him. But to those slight provocations, and frivolous offences, which are the most frequent causes of disquiet, he is happily superiour. Hence his days flow in a far more placid tenour than those of others: exempted from the numberless discomposures which agitate vulgar minds. Inspired with higher sentiments; taught to regard with indulgent eye the frailties of men, the omissions of the careless, the follies of the imprudent, and the levity of the fickle, he retreats into the calmness of his spirit, as into an undisturbed sanctuary; and quietly allows the usual current of life to hold its course.

This virtue has another, and still more important, connexion with our interest, by means of that relation which our present behaviour bears to our eternal state. Heaven is the region of gentleness and friendship: Hell, of fierceness and animosity. If then, as the scripture instructs us, *according to what we now sow, we must hereafter reap;* it follows, that the cultivation of a gentle temper is necessary to prepare us for heavenly felicity, and that the indulgence of harsh

dispositions is the introduction to future misery. Men, I am afraid, too often separate those articles of their belief which relate to eternity, from the ordinary affairs of the world. They connect them with the seasons of seriousness and gravity. They leave them with much respect, as in a high region, to which, only on great occasions, they resort; and, when they descend into common life, consider themselves as at liberty to give free scope to their humours and passions. Whereas, in fact, it is their behaviour in the daily train of social intercourse, which, more than any other cause, fixes and determines their spiritual character; gradually instilling those dispositions, and forming those habits, which affect their everlasting condition. With regard to trifles, perhaps their malignant dispositions may chiefly be indulged. But let them remember well, that those trifles, by increasing the growth of peevishness and passion, become pregnant with the most serious mischiefs; and may fit them, before they are aware, for being the future companions of none but infernal spirits.

I mean not to say, that, in order to our preparation for Heaven, it is enough to be mild and gentle; or that this virtue alone will cover all our sins. Through the felicity of natural constitution, a certain degree of this benignity may be possessed by some, whose hearts are in other respects corrupt, and their lives irregular. But what I mean to assert is, That where no attention is given to the government of temper, meetness for Heaven is not yet acquired, and the regenerating power of religion is as yet unknown. One of the first works of the spirit of God is, to infuse into every heart which it inhabits, that *gentle*

wisdom which is from above. They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts; but let it not be forgotten, that among the *works of the flesh, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings,* are as expressly enumerated, as *uncleanness, murders, drunkenness, and* * *revellings.* They who continue either in the one, or the other, *shall not inherit,* indeed cannot inherit, *the kingdom of God.*

Having thus shewn the importance of gentleness, both as a moral virtue, and as a Christian grace, I shall conclude the subject, with briefly suggesting some considerations which may be of use to facilitate the practice of it.

For this end, let me advise you to view your character with an impartial eye; and to learn from your own failings, to give that indulgence which in your turn you claim. It is pride which fills the world with so much harshness and severity. In the fulness of self-estimation, we forget what we are. We claim attentions to which we are not entitled. We are rigorous to offences, as if we had never offended; unfeeling to distress, as if we knew not what it was to suffer. From those airy regions of pride and folly, let us descend to our proper level. Let us survey the natural equality on which Providence has placed man with man, and reflect on the infirmities common to all. If the reflection on natural equality and mutual offences be insufficient to prompt humanity, let us at least remember what we are in the sight of God. Have we none of that forbear-

* Gal. v. 19, 20, 21.

ance to give to one another, which we all so earnestly intreat from Heaven? Can we look for clemency or gentleness from our Judge, when we are so backward to shew it to our own brethren?

Accustom yourselves also to reflect on the small moment of those things which are the usual incentives to violence and contention. In the ruffled and angry hour, we view every appearance through a false medium. The most inconsiderable point of interest, or honour, swells into a momentous object; and the slightest attack seems to threaten immediate ruin. But after passion or pride has subsided, we look round in vain for the mighty mischiefs we dreaded. The fabric, which our disturbed imagination had reared, totally disappears. But though the cause of contention has dwindled away, its consequences remain. We have alienated a friend, we have embittered an enemy; we have sown the seeds of future suspicion, malevolence, or disgust.—Suspend your violence, I beseech you, for a moment, when causes of discord occur. Anticipate that period of coolness, which of itself will soon arrive. Allow yourselves to think, how little you have any prospect of gaining by fierce contention; but how much of the true happiness of life you are certain of throwing away. Easily, and from the smallest chink, the bitter waters of strife are let forth; but their course cannot be foreseen; and he seldom fails of suffering most from their poisonous effect, who first allowed them to flow.

But gentleness will, most of all, be promoted by frequent views of those great objects which our holy religion presents. Let the prospects of immortality fill your minds. Look upon this world as a

state of passage. Consider yourselves as engaged in the pursuits of higher interests; as acting now, under the eye of God, an introductory part to a more important scene. Elevated by such sentiments, your minds will become calm and sedate. You will look down, as from a superiour station, on the petty disturbances of the world. They are the selfish, the sensual, and the vain, who are most subject to the impotence of passion. They are linked so closely to the world; by so many sides, they touch every object, and every person around them, that they are perpetually hurt, and perpetually hurting others. But the spirit of true religion removes us to a proper distance from the grating objects of worldly contention. It leaves us sufficiently connected with the world, for acting our part in it with propriety; but disengages us from it so far, as to weaken its power of disturbing our tranquillity. It inspires magnanimity; and magnanimity always breathes gentleness. It leads us to view the follies of men with pity, not with rancour; and to treat, with the mildness of a superiour nature, what in little minds would call forth all the bitterness of passion.

Aided by such considerations, let us cultivate that gentle wisdom which is, in so many respects, important both to our duty and our happiness. Let us assume it as the ornament of every age, and of every station. Let it temper the petulance of youth, and soften the moroseness of old age. Let it mitigate authority in those who rule, and promote deference among those who obey. I conclude with repeating the caution, not to mistake for true gentleness that flimsy imitation of it called polished

manners, which often, among men of the world, under a smooth appearance, conceals much asperity. Let yours be native gentleness of heart, flowing from the love of God, and the love of man. Unite this amiable spirit with a proper zeal for all that is right, and just, and true. Let piety be combined in your character with humanity. Let determined integrity dwell in a mild and gentle breast. A character thus supported will command more real respect, than can be procured by the most shining accomplishments, when separated from virtue.

SERMON VII.

On the Disorders of the Passions.

Esther, v. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

THESE are the words of one, who, though high in station and in power, confessed himself to be miserable. They relate to a memorable occurrence in the Persian history, under the reign of Ahasuerus, who is supposed to be the Prince known among the Greek historians by the name of Artaxerxes. Ahasuerus had advanced to the chief dignity in his kingdom, Haman, an Amalekite, who inherited all the ancient enmity of his race to the Jewish nation. He appears, from what is recorded of him, to have been a very wicked minister. Raised to greatness without merit, he employed his power solely for the gratification of his passions. As the honours which he possessed were next to royal, his pride was every day fed with that servile homage which is peculiar to Asiatic courts; and all the servants of the King prostrated themselves before him. In the midst of this general adulation, one person only stooped not to Haman. This was Mordecai the Jew; who, knowing this Amalekite

to be an enemy to the people of God, and, with virtuous indignation, despising that insolence of prosperity with which he saw him lifted up, *bowed not, nor did him reverence.* On this appearance of disrespect from Mordecai, Haman *was full of wrath: but he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone.* Personal revenge was not sufficient to satisfy him. So violent and black were his passions, that he resolved to exterminate the whole nation to which Mordecai belonged. Abusing, for this cruel purpose, the favour of his credulous Sovereign, he obtained a decree to be sent forth, that, against a certain day, all the Jews throughout the Persian dominions should be put to the sword. Meanwhile, confident of success, and blind to approaching ruin, he continued exulting in his prosperity. Invited by Ahasuerus to a royal banquet, which Esther the Queen had prepared, *he went forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart.* But behold how slight an incident was sufficient to poison his joy! As he went forth, he saw Mordecai in the King's gate; and observed, that still he refused to do him homage. *He stood not up, nor was moved for him;* although he well knew the formidable designs which Haman was preparing to execute. One private man, who despised his greatness, and disdained submission, while a whole kingdom trembled before him; one spirit, which the utmost stretch of his power could neither subdue nor humble, blasted his triumphs. His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge, rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public; but as soon as he came to his own house, he was forced

to disclose the agony of his mind. He gathered together his friends and family, with Zerish his wife. *He told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the King had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the King. He said, moreover, Yea, Esther the Queen did let no man come in with the King unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow also am I invited unto her with the King.* — After all this preamble, what is the conclusion? — *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.*

The sequel of Haman's history I shall not now pursue. It might afford matter for much instruction, by the conspicuous justice of God in his fall and punishment. But, contemplating only the singular situation in which the text presents him, and the violent agitation of his mind which it displays, the following reflections naturally arise, which, together with some practical improvements, shall make the subject of this discourse. I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion creates so much torment! II. How unavailing is prosperity, when, in the height of it, a single disappointment can destroy the relish of all its pleasures! III. How weak is human nature, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to form to itself imaginary woes.

I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion is capable of creating so much torment! When we discourse to you of the internal misery of sinners; when we represent the pangs which they suffer from violent passions, and a corrupted heart; we are some-

times suspected of chusing a theme for declamation, and of heightening the picture which we draw, by colours borrowed from fancy. They whose minds are, by nature, happily tranquil, or whose situation in life removes them from the disturbance and tumult of passion, can hardly conceive, that as long as the body is at ease, and the external condition prosperous, any thing which passes within the mind should cause such exquisite woe. But, for the truth of our assertions, we appeal to the history of mankind. We might reason from the constitution of the rational frame; where the understanding is appointed to be supreme, and the passions to be subordinate; and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery as necessarily ensues, as pain is consequent in the animal frame upon the distortion of its members. But laying speculations of this kind aside, it is sufficient to lead you to the view of facts, the import of which can neither be controverted, nor mistaken. This is, indeed, the great advantage of history, that it is a mirror which holds up mankind to their own view. For, in all ages, human nature has been the same. In the circle of worldly affairs, the same characters and situations are perpetually returning; and in the follies and passions, the vices and crimes, of the generations that are past, we read those of the present.

Attend then to the instance now before us; and conceive, if you can, a person more thoroughly wretched, than one reduced to make this humiliating confession, that though surrounded with power, opulence, and pleasure, he was lost to all happiness, through the fierceness of his resentment; and was at that moment stung by disappointment, and torn by

rage beyond what he could bear. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.* Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery, but when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows he can, with freedom, pour out to a confidant. What he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world, he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his suffering arises from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity, in particular, must he be reduced, before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery? In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect, seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge then of the degree of torment which Haman endured, by its breaking through all these restraints, and forcing him to publish his shame before those from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict which he underwent within himself, before he called together his

wife and all his friends for this purpose! How dreadful the agony he suffered at the moment of his confession, when, to the astonished company, he laid open the cause of his distress!

Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less pungent, than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world, the mind can exert its powers, and suggest relief: And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer, and his sufferings, can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its strong-hold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation; and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture.

Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God; and admire his justice, in thus making the sinner's *own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him.* Sceptics reason in vain against the reality of divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense, and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly *pursuing the sinner with evil.* We see him connecting with every single deviation from duty, those wounds of the spirit which occasion the most exquisite torments. He hath not merely promulgated his laws now, and delayed the distribution of rewards and punishments until a future period of being. But the sanctions of his laws already take place; their effects appear; and with such infinite wisdom are they contrived, as to require no other executioners of justice against the sinner, than his

own guilty passions. God needs not come forth from his secret place, in order to bring him to punishment. He needs not call thunder down from the heavens, nor raise any ministers of wrath from the abyss below. He needs only say, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone:* And, at that instant, the sinner becomes his own tormentor. The infernal fire begins, of itself, to kindle within him. The worm that never dies, seizes on his heart.

Let us remark also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge, from external appearances, concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not within its bounds one more thoroughly wretched. We are seduced and deceived by that false glare which prosperity sometimes throws around bad men. We are tempted to imitate their crimes, in order to partake of their imagined felicity. But remember Haman, and beware of the snare. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion, you must follow the great man into the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise; you must not only be able to penetrate into the interiour of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. Were you endowed with such a power, you would most commonly behold good men, in proportion to their goodness, satisfied and easy; you would behold atrocious sinners always restless and unhappy.

Unjust are our complaints, of the promiscuous distribution made by Providence, of its favours among

men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men; but the allotment of real happiness is never so. For *to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travel with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrours make them afraid on every side. A dreadful sound is in their ears; and they are in great fear where no fear is.* — Hitherto we have considered Haman under the character of a very wicked man, tormented by criminal passions. Let us now consider him merely as a child of fortune, a prosperous man of the world; and proceed to observe,

II. How unavailing worldly prosperity is, since, in the midst of it, a single disappointment is sufficient to embitter all its pleasures. We might at first imagine, that the natural effect of prosperity would be to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction, which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect, that as one in the full glow of health, despises the inclemency of weather; so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station, should disregard slight injuries; and, at perfect ease with himself, should view, in the most favourable light, the behaviour of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow, if worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates, instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is, to create an ex-

treme sensibility to the slightest wound. It foments impatient desires; and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification, it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing; and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence, the gale which another would scarcely feel, is to the prosperous a rude tempest. Hence the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as it is told of the effeminate Sybarite, breaks their rest. Hence, the disrespect shewn by Mordecai preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident occasioned to him. The cause lay not in the external incident. It lay within himself; it arose from a mind distempered by prosperity.

Let this example correct that blind eagerness, with which we rush to the chace of worldly greatness and honours. I say not, that it should altogether divert us from pursuing them; since, when enjoyed with temperance and wisdom, they may doubtless both enlarge our utility, and contribute to our comfort. But let it teach us not to over-rate them. Let it convince us, that unless we add to them the necessary correctives of piety and virtue, they are by themselves more likely to render us wretched, than to make us happy.

Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also, how often, besides corrupting the mind and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices, and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him with the most serene and settled aspect, she was digging in

secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the Queen; and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai.—Had Haman remained in a private station, he might have arrived at a peaceable old age. He might have been, I shall not say a good or a happy man, yet probably far less guilty, and less wretched, than when placed at the head of the greatest empire in the East. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life? all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow.*

An extensive contemplation of human affairs will lead us to this conclusion, That among the different conditions and ranks of men, the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other, than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man, mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place. Providence never intended, that any state here should be either completely happy or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous, and more lively, in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters our vanity, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions, which after all the refinements of art,

are found to be the most genuine and true.—In a state, therefore, where there is neither so much to be coveted on the one hand, nor to be dreaded on the other, as at first appears, how submissive ought we to be to the disposal of Providence! How temperate in our desires and pursuits! How much more attentive to preserve our virtue, and to improve our minds, than to gain the doubtful and equivocal advantages of worldly prosperity!—— But now laying aside the consideration of Haman's great crimes; laying aside his high prosperity; viewing him simply as a man; let us observe, from his history,

III. How weak human nature is, which in the absence of real, is thus prone to create to itself imaginary woes. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.* —— What was it, O Haman! to thee, though Mordecai had continued to sit there and neglected to do thee homage? Would the banquet have been on that account the less magnificent, thy palace less splendid, or thy retinue less numerous? Could the disrespect of an obscure stranger dishonour the favourite of a mighty King? In the midst of a thousand submissive courtiers, was one sullen countenance an object worthy of drawing thy notice, or of troubling thy repose?—Alas! in Haman we behold too just a picture of what often passes within ourselves. We never know what it is to be long at ease. Let the world cease from changing around us: let external things keep that situation in which we most wish them to remain; yet somewhat from within shall soon arise, to disturb our happiness. A *Mordecai* appears, or seems to appear, *sitting at the gate.* Some

vexation, which our fancy has either entirely created, or at least has unreasonably aggravated, corrodes us in secret; and until that be removed, all that we enjoy *availeth us nothing*. Thus, while we are incessantly complaining of the vanity and the evils of human life, we make that vanity, and we increase those evils. Unskilled in the art of extracting happiness from the objects around us, our ingenuity solely appears in converting them into misery.

Let it not be thought, that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them; yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows; preys upon the citizen, no less than upon the courtier? and often nourishes passions equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it every where searches out materials for itself; and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity, than in creating divisions amongst mankind, and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause, but real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils, not inferiour, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose.

Hence, discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among nations. Hence, Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence, multitudes in the most obscure stations, for whom Providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended.

From this train of observation, which the Text has suggested, can we avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? We have beheld, in Haman, the picture of that misery which arises from evil passions; of that unhappiness, which is incident to the highest prosperity; of that discontent, which is common to every state. Whether we consider him as a bad man, a prosperous man, or simply as a man, in every light we behold reason too weak for passion. This is the source of the reigning evil; this is the root of the universal disease. The story of Haman only shews us, what human nature has too generally appeared to be in every age. Hence, when we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of the follies and crimes of men? We may dignify those recorded transactions, by calling them the intrigues of statesmen, and the exploits of conquerors; but they are, in truth, no other than the efforts of discontent to escape from its misery, and the struggles of contending passions among unhappy men. The history of mankind has ever been a continued tragedy; the world a great theatre exhibiting the same repeated scene, of the follies of men shooting

forth into guilt, and of their passions fermenting, by a quick process, into misery.

But can we believe, that the nature of man came forth in this state from the hands of its gracious Creator? Did he frame this world, and store it with inhabitants, solely that it might be replenished with crimes and misfortunes? — In the moral, as well as in the natural world, we may plainly discern the signs of some violent convulsion, which has shattered the original workmanship of the Almighty. Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardour of enterprise, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendour appears amidst its ruins. So conspicuous in human nature are those characters, both of a high origin, and of a degraded state, that by many religious sects throughout the earth, they have been seen and confessed. A tradition seems to have pervaded almost all nations, that the human race had either through some offence forfeited, or through some misfortune lost, that station of primæval honour which they once possessed. But while from this doctrine, ill understood and involved in many fabulous tales, the nations wandering in Pagan darkness could draw no consequences that were just; while totally ignorant of the nature of the disease, they sought in vain for the remedy; the same divine revelation, which has informed us in what manner our apostacy arose from the abuse of

our rational powers, has instructed us also how we may be restored to virtue and to happiness.

Let us, therefore, study to improve the assistance which this revelation affords for the restoration of our nature, and the recovery of our felicity. With humble and grateful minds, let us apply to those medicinal springs which it hath opened, for curing the disorders of our heart and passions. In this view, let us, with reverence, look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world, on purpose to be *the light and the life of men;* who came in the fulness of grace and truth, to *repair the desolation of many generations,* to restore order among the works of God, and to raise up a *new earth and new heavens, wherein righteousness should dwell for ever.* Under his tuition let us put ourselves; and amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a Heavenly Conductor vouchsafes his aid, let us earnestly pray, that from him may descend divine light to guide our steps, and divine strength to fortify our minds. Let us pray, that his grace may keep us from all intemperate passions, and mistaken pursuits of pleasure; that whether it shall be his will to give or to deny us earthly prosperity, he may bless us with a calm, a sound, and well-regulated mind; may give us moderation in success, and fortitude under disappointment; and may enable us so to take warning from the crimes and miseries of others, as to escape the snares of guilt.

While we thus maintain a due dependence on

God, let us also exert ourselves with care in acting our own part. From the whole of what has been said, this important instruction arises, that the happiness of every man depends more upon the state of his own mind, than upon any one external circumstance; nay, more than upon all external things put together. We have seen, that inordinate passions are the great disturbers of life; and that, unless we possess a good conscience, and a well-governed mind, discontent will blast every enjoyment, and the highest prosperity will prove only disguised misery. Fix then this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue is the destruction of your peace. *Keep thy heart with all diligence;* govern it with the greatest care; *for out of it are the issues of life.* In no station, in no period, think yourselves sècure from the dangers which spring from your passions. Every age and every station they beset; from youth to grey hairs, and from the peasant to the prince.

At your first setting out in life, especially when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty; beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. But if any which has the taint of guilt, take early possession of your mind, you may date from that moment the ruin of your tranquillity. Nor with the season of youth does the peril end. To the impetuosity of youthful desire, succeed the more sober, but no less dangerous attachments of advancing years;

when the passions which are connected with interest and ambition begin their reign, and too frequently extend their malignant influence, even over those periods of life which ought to be most tranquil. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed, of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions, and violent desires, were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth; and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. The certain consequence of indulging them is, that there shall come an evil day, when the anguish of disappointment shall drive us to acknowledge, that all which we enjoy *availeth us nothing*.

You are not to imagine, that the warnings which I have given in this discourse, are applicable only to the case of such signal offenders as he was, of whom the Text treats. Think not, as I am afraid too many do, that because your passions have not hurried you into atrocious deeds, they have therefore wrought no mischief, and have left no sting behind them. By a continued series of loose, though apparently trivial gratifications, the heart is often as thoroughly corrupted, as by the commission of any one of those enormous crimes which spring from great ambition, or great revenge. Habit gives the passions strength, while the absence of glaring guilt seemingly justifies them; and, unawakened by remorse, the sinner proceeds in his course, till he wax bold in guilt, and become ripe for ruin. For by gradual and latent steps, the destruction of our virtue advances. Did the evil unveil itself at the beginning; did the storm which is to overthrow our peace, discover, as it rose, all its horrours, precautions would more frequently be

taken against it. But we are imperceptibly betrayed; and from one licentious attachment, one criminal passion, are, by a train of consequences, drawn on to another, till the government of our minds is irrecoverably lost. The enticing and the odious passions are, in this respect, similar in their process; and, though by different roads, conduct at last to the same issue. David, when he first beheld Bathsheba, did not plan the death of Uriah. Haman was not delivered up all at once to the madness of revenge. His passions rose with the rising tide of prosperity; and pride completed what prosperity began. What was originally no more than displeasure at Mordecai's disrespect, increased with every invitation he received to the banquet of the Queen; till it impelled him to devise the slaughter of a whole nation, and ended in a degree of rage which confounded his reason, and hurried him to ruin. In this manner, every criminal passion, in its progress, swells and blackens; and what was at first a small cloud, such as the prophet's servant saw, *no bigger than a man's hand rising from the sea* *, is soon found to carry the tempest in its womb.

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44.

SERMON VIII.

On our Ignorance of Good and Evil in this Life.

Eccles. vi. 12.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?

THE measure according to which knowledge is dispensed to man, affords conspicuous proofs of divine wisdom. In many instances we clearly perceive, that either more or less would have proved detrimental to his state; that entire ignorance would have deprived him of proper motives to action; and that complete discovery would have raised him to a sphere too high for his present powers. He is, therefore, permitted to *know only in part; and to see through a glass, darkly.* He is left in that state of conjecture, and partial information, which though it may occasionally subject him to distress, yet, on the whole, conduces most to his improvement; which affords him knowledge sufficient for the purposes of virtue, and of active life, without disturbing the operations of his mind, by a light too bright and dazzling. This evidently holds with respect to that degree of obscurity which now covers the great laws of Nature, the decrees of the Supreme Being, the state of the invisible world, the future events of our

own life, and the thoughts and designs which pass within the breasts of others.*

But there is an ignorance of another kind, with respect to which the application of this remark may appear more dubious; the ignorance under which men labour concerning their happiness in the present life, and the means of obtaining it. If there be foundation for Solomon's complaint in the Text, *who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* this consequence may be thought inevitably to follow, that the *days of his life* must be *vain* in every sense; not only because they are fleeting, but because they are empty too, like the *shadow*. For to what purpose are all his labours in the pursuit of an object, which it is not in his power to discover or ascertain? — Let us then seriously enquire, what account can be given of our present ignorance, respecting what is good for us in this life; whether nothing be left, but only to wander in uncertainty amidst this darkness, and to lament it as the sad consequence of our fallen state; or whether such instructions may not be derived from it, as give ground for acknowledging, that by this, as by all its other appointments, the wisdom of Providence brings real good out of seeming evil. I shall, in order to determine this point, first endeavour to illustrate the doctrine of the Text, That we know not, or at most know imperfectly, *what is good for us in this life:* I shall next explain the causes to which this defect in our knowledge is owing: And then shall shew the purposes which it was intended to serve, and the effects which it ought to produce on our conduct.

* Vide Sermon IV.

THE whole history of mankind seems a comment on the doctrine of the Text. When we review the course of human affairs, one of the first objects which every where attracts our notice, is the mistaken judgment of men concerning their own interest. The *sore evil* which Solomon long ago remarked with respect to riches, of their being *kept by the owners thereof to their hurt*, takes place equally with respect to dominion and power, and all the splendid objects and high stations of life. We every day behold men climbing, by painful steps, to that dangerous height, which, in the end, renders their fall more severe, and their ruin more conspicuous. But it is not to high stations that the doctrine of the Text is limited. In the crimes by which too often these are gained, and in the misfortunes which they afterwards bring forth, the greater part of every audience may think themselves little concerned. Leaving such themes, therefore, to the poet and the historian, let us come nearer to ourselves, and survey the ordinary walk of life.

Around us, we every where behold a busy multitude. Restless and uneasy in their present situation, they are incessantly employed in accomplishing a change of it; and as soon as their wish is fulfilled, we discern by their behaviour, that they are as dissatisfied as they were before. Where they expected to have found a paradise, they find a desert. The man of business pines for leisure. The leisure for which he had longed, proves an irksome gloom: and, through want of employment, he languishes, sickens, and dies. The man of retirement fancies no state to be so happy as that of active life. But he has not engaged long in the tumults and contests of the world,

until he finds cause to look back with regret on the calm hours of his former privacy and retreat. Beauty, wit, eloquence, and fame, are eagerly desired by persons in every rank of life. They are the parent's fondest wish for his child; the ambition of the young, and the admiration of the old. And yet, in what numberless instances have they proved, to those who possessed them, no other than shining snares; seductions to vice, instigations to folly, and, in the end, sources of misery? Comfortably might their days have passed, had they been less conspicuous. But the distinctions which brought them forth to notice, conferred splendour, and withdrew happiness. Long life is, of all others, the most general, and seemingly the most innocent object of desire. With respect to this, too, we so frequently err, that it would have been a blessing to many, to have had their wish denied. There was a period when they might have quitted the stage with honour, and in peace. But, by living too long, they outlived their reputation; outlived their family, their friends, and comforts; and reaped nothing from the continuance of days, except to feel the pressure of age, to taste the dregs of life, and to behold a wider compass of human misery.

Man walketh in a vain show. His fears are often as vain as his wishes. As what flattered him in expectation, frequently wounds him in possession; so the event to which he looked forward with an anxious and fearful eye, has often, when it arrived, laid its terrours aside; nay, has brought in its train unexpected blessings. Both good and evil are beheld at a distance through a perspective which deceives. The colours of objects when nigh, are entirely different

from what they appeared when they were viewed in futurity.

The fact then being undoubtedly certain, that it is common for men to be deceived in their prospects of happiness, let us next inquire into the causes of that deception. Let us attend to those peculiar circumstances in our state, which render us such incompetent judges of future good or evil in this life.

First, We are not sufficiently acquainted with ourselves to foresee our future feelings. We judge by the sensations of the present moment; and, in the fervour of desire, pronounce confidently concerning the desired object. But we reflect not that our minds, like our bodies, undergo great alteration, from the situations into which they are thrown, and the progressive stages of life through which they pass. Hence, concerning any condition which is yet untried, we conjecture with much uncertainty. In imagination, we carry our present wants, inclinations, and sentiments, into the state of life to which we aspire. But no sooner have we entered on it, than our sentiments and inclinations change. New wants and desires arise; new objects are required to gratify them; and by consequence our old dissatisfaction returns, and the void which was to have been filled, remains as great as it was before.

But next, supposing our knowledge of ourselves sufficient to direct us in the choice of happiness, yet still we are liable to err, from our ignorance of the connexions which subsist between our own condition and that of others. No individual can be happy, unless the circumstances of those around him be so adjusted as to conspire with his interest. For, in

human society, no happiness or misery stands unconnected and independent. Our fortunes are interwoven by threads innumerable. We touch one another on all sides. One man's misfortune or success, his wisdom or his folly, often, by its consequences, reaches through multitudes. Such a system is far too complicated for our arrangement. It requires adjustments beyond our skill and power. It is a chaos of events into which our eye cannot pierce; and is capable of regulation, only by Him who perceives at one glance the relation of each to all.

Farther, as we are ignorant of the events which will arise from the combination of our circumstances with those of others, so we are equally ignorant of the influence which the present transactions of our life may have upon those which are future. The important question is not, What is good for a man one day? but, What is *good for him all the days of his life?* — Not, What will yield him a few scattered pleasures? but, What will render his life happy on the whole amount? And is he able to answer that question, who knoweth not what *one day may bring forth;* who cannot tell, whether the events of it may not branch out into consequences, which will assume a direction quite opposite to that in which they set forth, and spread themselves over all his life to come? There is not any present moment that is unconnected with some future one. The life of every man is a continued chain of incidents, each link of which hangs upon the former. The transition from cause to effect, from event to event, is often carried on by secret steps, which our foresight cannot divine, and our sagacity is unable to trace. Evil may, at some future period, bring forth good; and good may

bring forth evil, both equally unexpected. Had the Patriarch, Joseph, continued to loiter under his father's fond indulgence, he might have lived an obscure and insignificant life. From the pit and the prison, arose the incidents which made him the ruler of Egypt, and the saviour of his father's house.

Lastly, Supposing every other incapacity to be removed, our ignorance of the dangers to which our spiritual state is exposed, would disqualify us for judging soundly concerning our true happiness. Higher interests than those of the present world are now depending. All that is done or suffered by us here, ultimately refers to that immortal world, for which good men are trained up, under the care of an Almighty Parent. We are as incompetent judges of the measures necessary to be pursued for this end, as children are of the proper conduct to be held in their education. We foresee the dangers of our spiritual, still less than we do those of our natural state; because we are less attentive to trace them. We are still more exposed to vice than to misery: because the confidence which we place in our virtue, is yet worse founded than that which we place in our wisdom. Can you esteem him prosperous who is raised to a situation which flatters his passions, but which corrupts his principles, disorders his temper; and, finally, oversets his virtue? In the ardour of pursuit, how little are these effects foreseen! And yet, how often are they accomplished by a change of condition! Latent corruptions are called forth; seeds of guilt are quickened into life: a growth of crimes arises, which, had it not been for the fatal culture of prosperity, would never have seen the light. How often is man, boastful as he is of reason, merely the crea-

ture of his fortune; formed and moulded by the incidents of his life! — Hazael, when yet a private man, detested the thoughts of cruelty. *Thou shalt slay the young men with the sword*, said the Prophet: *Thou shalt dash the children, and rip up the women with child. Is thy servant a dog*, replied Hazael, *that he should do these things?* * But no sooner was he clothed with the coveted purple, than it seemed to taint his nature. He committed the crimes of which, at a distance he believed himself incapable; and became the bloody tyrant whose character his soul once abhorred.

Such then at present is man; thus incapable of pronouncing with certainty concerning his own good or evil. Of futurity, he discerns little; and even that little he sees through a cloud. Ignorant of the alteration which his sentiments and desires will undergo, from new situations in life; ignorant of the consequences which will follow from the combination of his circumstances with those of others around him; ignorant of the influence which the present may have on the future events of his life; ignorant of the effect which a change of condition may produce on his moral character, and his eternal interests; how can he know *what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?*

Instead of only lamenting this ignorance, let us, in the last place, consider how it ought to be improved; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by Providence to promote.

* 2 Kings, viii. 12, 13.

I. LET this doctrine teach us to proceed with caution and circumspection, through a world where evil so frequently lurks under the form of good. To be humble and modest in opinion, to be vigilant and attentive in conduct, to distrust fair appearances and to restrain rash desires, are instructions which the darkness of our present state should strongly inculcate. God hath appointed our situation to be so ambiguous, in order both to call forth the exertion of those intelligent powers which he hath given us, and to enforce our dependence on his gracious aid. *It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Surrounded with so many bewildering paths, among which the wisest are ready to stray, how earnestly should we implore, and how thankfully should we receive that divine illumination which is promised in Scripture to the pious and the humble! *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He will guide them with his counsel. He will teach them the way that they should choose.* But what must be the fate of him, who, amidst all the dangers attending human conduct, neither looks up to Heaven for direction, nor properly exerts that reason which God hath given him? If to the most diligent enquirer, it proves so difficult a task to distinguish true good from those fallacious appearances with which it is ever blended, how should he discover it who brings neither patience nor attention to the search; who applies to no other counsellor than present pleasure, and, with a rash and credulous mind, delivers himself up to every suggestion of desire?

This admonition I particularly direct to those, who are in a period of life too often characterised by forward presumption and headlong pursuit. The self-

conceit of the young is the great source of those dangers to which they are exposed, and it is peculiarly unfortunate, that the age which stands most in need of the counsel of the wise, should be the most prone to contemn it. Confident in the opinions which they adopt, and in the measures which they pursue, they seem as if they understood Solomon to say, not, *Who knoweth*, but, who is ignorant of *what is good for man all the days of his life?* The bliss to be aimed at, is, in their opinion, fully apparent. It is not the danger of mistake, but the failure of success, which they dread. Activity to seize, not sagacity to discern, is the only requisite which they value. —— How long shall it be, ere the fate of your predecessors in the same course teach you wisdom? How long shall the experience of all ages continue to lift its voice to you in vain? Beholding the ocean on which you are embarked covered with wrecks, are not those fatal signals sufficient to admonish you of the hidden rock? If, in Paradise itself, there was a tree which bare fruit fair to the eye, but mortal in its effects, how much more, in this fallen state, may such deceiving appearances be expected to abound! The whole state of Nature is now become a scene of delusion to the sensual mind. Hardly any thing is what it appears to be. And what flatters most, is always farthest from reality. There are voices which sing around you; but whose strains allure to ruin. There is a banquet spread, where poison is in every dish. There is a couch which invites you to repose; but to slumber upon it is death. In such a situation, *be not high-minded, but fear.* Let sobriety temper your unwary ardour. Let modesty check your rash presumption. Let wisdom be the offspring of reflec-

tion now, rather than the fruit of bitter experience hereafter.

II. Let our ignorance of what is good or evil, correct anxiety about worldly success. As rashness is the vice of youth, the opposite extreme of immoderate care is the vice of advancing years. The doctrine which I have illustrated, is equally adapted for checking both. Since we are so often betrayed into evil by the mistaken pursuit of good, care and attention are requisite, both in forming our choice, and in conducting our pursuit; but since our attention and care are liable to be so often frustrated, they should never be allowed to deprive us of tranquillity.

The ignorance in which we are left concerning good and evil, is not such as to supersede prudence in conduct: For wisdom is still found to *excel folly as far as light excelleth darkness.* But it is that degree of uncertainty, which ought to render us temperate in pursuit; which ought to calm the perturbation of hope and fear, and to cure the pain of anxiety. Anxiety is the poison of human life. It is the parent of many sins, and of more miseries. In a world where every thing is so doubtful, where you may succeed in your wish, and be miserable; where you may be disappointed, and be blest in the disappointment; what means this restless stir and commotion of mind? Can your solicitude alter the course, or unravel the intricacy of human events? Can your curiosity pierce through the cloud which the Supreme Being hath made impenetrable to mortal eye? — To provide against every apparent danger, by the employment of the most promising means, is the office of wisdom. But at this point wisdom stops.

It commands you to retire, after you have done all that was incumbent on you, and to possess your mind in peace. By going beyond this point; by giving yourselves up to immoderate concern about unknown events, you can do nothing to advance your success, and you do much to ruin your peace. You plant within your breast the thorn which is long to gall you. To the vanity of life, you add a vexation of spirit, which is wholly of your own creation, not of Divine appointment. For the dubious goods of this world were never designed by God to raise such eager attachment. They were given to man for his occasional refreshment, not for his chief felicity. By setting an excessive value upon objects which were intended only for your secondary regard, you change their nature. Seeking more satisfaction from them than they are able to afford, you receive less than they might give. From a mistaken care to secure your happiness, you bring upon yourselves certain misery.

III. Let our ignorance of good and evil determine us to follow Providence, and to resign ourselves to God. One of the most important lessons which can be given to man, is resignation to his Maker; and nothing inculcates it more than the experience of his own inability to guide himself.—You know not what is good for you, in the future periods of life. But God perfectly knows it; and if you faithfully serve him, you have reason to believe that he will always consult it. Before him lies the whole succession of events which are to fill up your existence. It is in his power to arrange and model them at his pleasure, and so to adapt one thing to another, as to fulfil his

promise of making them *all work together for good to those who love him.* Here then, amidst the agitations of desire, and the perplexities of doubt, is one fixed point of rest. By this let us abide; and dismiss our anxiety about things uncertain and unknown. *Acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace.* Secure the *one thing needful.* Study to acquire an interest in the Divine favour; and you may safely surrender yourselves to the Divine administration.

When tempted to repine at your condition, reflect how uncertain it is, whether you should have been happier in any other. Remembering the vanity of many of your former wishes, and the fallacy which you have so often experienced in your schemes of happiness, be thankful that you are placed under a wiser direction than your own. Be not too particular in your petitions to Heaven, concerning your temporal interest. Suffer God to govern the world according to his own plan; and only pray, that he would bestow what his unerring wisdom seems to be best for you on the whole. In a word, *Commit your way unto the Lord. Trust in him, and do good.* Follow wherever his Providence leads; comply with whatever his will requires; and leave all the rest to him.

IV. Let our ignorance of what is good for us in this life, prevent our taking any unlawful step, in order to compass our most favourite designs. Were the sinner bribed with any certain and unquestionable advantage; could the means which he employs ensure his success, and could that success ensure his comfort; he might have some apology to offer for deviating from the path of virtue. But the doctrine

which I have illustrated deprives him of all excuse, and places his folly in the most striking light. He climbs the steep rock, and treads on the edge of a precipice, in order to catch a shadow. He has cause to dread not only the uncertainty of the event which he wishes to accomplish, but the nature also of that event when accomplished. He is not only liable to that disappointment of success, which so often frustrates all the designs of men; but liable to a disappointment still more cruel, that of being successful and miserable at once. Riches and pleasures are the chief temptations to criminal deeds. Yet those riches, when obtained, may very possibly overwhelm him with unforeseen miseries. Those pleasures may cut short his health and life. And is it for such doubtful and fallacious rewards, that the deceiver fills his mouth with lies, the friend betrays his benefactor, the apostate renounces his faith, and the assassin covers himself with blood?

Whoever commits a crime, incurs a certain evil for a most uncertain good. What will turn to his advantage in the course of this life, he cannot with any assurance know. But this he may know, with full certainty, that by breaking the Divine commandments, he will draw upon his head that displeasure of the Almighty, which shall crush him for ever. The advantages of this world, even when innocently gained, are uncertain blessings; when obtained by criminal means, they carry a curse in their bosom. To the virtuous, they are often no more than chaff. To the guilty, they are always poison.

V. Let our imperfect knowledge of what is good or evil, attach us the more to those few things con-

cerning which there can be no doubt of their being truly good. Of temporal things which belong to this class, the catalogue, it must be confessed, is small. Perhaps the chief worldly good we should wish to enjoy, is a sound mind in a sound body. Health and peace, a moderate fortune, and a few friends, sum up all the undoubted articles of temporal felicity. Wise was the man who addressed this prayer to God; *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.* * He whose wishes respecting the possessions of this world, are the most reasonable and bounded, is likely to lead the safest, and for that reason, the most desirable life. By aspiring too high, we frequently miss the happiness which by a less ambitious aim, we might have gained. High happiness on earth, is rather a picture which the imagination forms than a reality which man is allowed to possess.

But with regard to spiritual felicity, we are not confined to such humble views. Clear and determinate objects are proposed to our pursuit; and full scope is given to the most ardent desire. The forgiveness of our sins, and the assistance of God's holy grace to guide our life; the improvement of our minds in knowledge and wisdom, in piety and virtue; the protection and favour of the great Father of all, of the blessed Redeemer of mankind, and of the Spirit of sanctification and comfort; these are objects, in the pursuit of which there is no room for hesitation

* Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

and distrust, nor any ground for the question in my Text, *Who knoweth what is good for man?* Had Providence spread an equal obscurity over happiness of every kind, we might have had some reason to complain of the vanity of our condition. But we are not left to so hard a fate. The Son of God hath descended from heaven to be the *Light of the world.* He hath removed that veil which covered true bliss from the search of wandering mortals, and hath taught them the way which leads to life. Worldly enjoyments are shown to be hollow and deceitful, with an express intention to direct their affections towards those which are spiritual. The same discoveries which diminish the value of the one, serve to increase that of the other. Finally,

VI. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil here below, lead our thoughts and desires to a better world. I have endeavoured to vindicate the wisdom of Providence, by showing the many useful purposes which this ignorance at present promotes. It serves to check presumption and rashness, and to enforce a diligent exertion of our rational powers, joined with a humble dependence on Divine aid. It moderates eager passions respecting worldly success. It inculcates resignation to the disposal of a Providence which is much wiser than man. It restrains us from employing unlawful means in order to compass our most favourite designs. It tends to attach us more closely to those things which are unquestionably good. It is therefore such a degree of ignorance as suits the present circumstances of man, better than more complete information concerning good and evil.

At the same time, the causes which render this

obscurity necessary, too plainly indicate a broken and corrupted state of human nature. They shew this life to be a state of trial. They suggest the ideas of a land of pilgrimage, not of the house of rest. Low-minded and base is he, who aspires to no higher portion; who could be satisfied to spend his whole existence in chasing those treacherous appearances of good, which so often mock his pursuit. What shadow can be more vain, than the life of the greatest part of mankind? Of all that eager and bustling crowd which we behold on the earth, how few discover the path of true happiness? How few can we find whose activity has not been misemployed, and whose course terminates not in confessions of disappointments? Is this the state, are these the habitations, to which a rational spirit, with all its high hopes and great capacities is to be limited for ever? — Let us bless that God who hath set nobler prospects before us; who by the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ, hath *begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens.* Let us shew ourselves worthy of such a hope, by *setting our affections upon the things above, not upon things on the earth.* Let us *walk by faith and not by sight;* and, amidst the obsurity of this faint and dubious twilight, console ourselves with the expectation of a brighter day which is soon to open. This earth is the land of shadows. But we hope to pass into the world of realities; where the proper objects of human desire shall be displayed; where the substance of that bliss shall be found, whose image only we now pursue; where no fallacious hopes shall any longer allure, no smiling appearances shall betray, no insidious joys

shall sting; but where truth shall be inseparably united with pleasure, and the mists which hang over this preliminary state being dissipated, the perfect knowledge of good shall lead to the full enjoyment of it for ever.

SERMON IX.

On Religious Retirement.

Psalm iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart, upon your bed, and be still.

MUCH communing with themselves there has always been among mankind, though frequently, God knows, to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Could we discover the employments of men in retirement, how often should we find their thoughts occupied with subjects which they would be ashamed to own? What a large share have ambition and avarice, at some times the grossest passions, and at other times the meanest trifles, in their solitary musings? They carry the world, with all its vices, into their retreat; and may be said to dwell in the midst of the world, even when they seem to be alone.

This, surely, is not that sort of communing which the Psalmist recommends. For this is not properly *communing with our heart*, but rather holding secret intercourse with the world. What the Psalmist means to recommend, is religious recollection; that exercise of thought which is connected with the precept given in the preceding words, *to stand in awe, and sin not.* It is to commune with ourselves, under

the character of spiritual and immortal beings; *and to ponder those paths of our feet*, which are leading us to eternity. I shall, in the first place, show the advantages of such serious retirement and meditation; and shall, in the second place, point out some of the principal subjects which ought to employ us in our retreat.

The advantages of retiring from the world, to *commune with our heart*, will be found to be great, whether we regard our happiness in this world, or our preparation for the world to come.

Let us consider them, first, with respect to our happiness in this world. It will readily occur to you, that an entire retreat from worldly affairs, is not what religion requires; nor does it even enjoin a great retreat from them. Some stations of life would not permit this; and there are few stations which render it necessary. The chief field, both of the duty and of the improvement of man, lies in active life. By the graces and virtues which he exercises amidst his fellow-creatures, he is trained up for heaven. A total retreat from the world is so far from being, as the Roman Catholic Church holds, the perfection of religion, that, some particular cases excepted, it is no other than the abuse of it.

But, though entire retreat would lay us aside from the part for which Providence chiefly intended us, it is certain, that, without occasional retreat, we must act that part very ill. There will be neither consistency in the conduct, nor dignity in the character, of one who sets apart no share of his time for meditation and reflection. In the heat and bustle of

life, while passion is every moment throwing false colours on the objects around us, nothing can be viewed in a just light. If you wish that reason should exert her native power, you must step aside from the crowd, into the cool and silent shade. It is there that, with sober and steady eye, she examines what is good or ill, what is wise or foolish, in human conduct; she looks back on the past, she looks forward to the future; and forms plans, not for the present moment only, but for the whole of life. How should that man discharge any part of his duty aright, who never suffers his passions to cool? And how should his passions cool, who is engaged, without interruption, in the tumult of the world? This incessant stir may be called the perpetual drunkenness of life. It raises that eager fermentation of spirit, which will be ever sending forth the dangerous fumes of rashness and folly. Whereas he who mingles religious retreat with worldly affairs, remains calm, and master of himself. He is not whirled round, and rendered giddy, by the agitations of the world; but, from that sacred retirement, in which he has been conversant among higher objects, comes forth into the world with manly tranquillity, fortified by the principles which he has formed, and prepared for whatever may befal.

As he who is unacquainted with retreat, cannot sustain any character with propriety, so neither can he enjoy the world with any advantage. Of the two classes of men who are most apt to be negligent of this duty, the men of pleasure and the men of business, it is hard to say which suffer most in point of enjoyment from that neglect. To the

former every moment appears to be lost, which partakes not of the vivacity of amusement. To connect one plan of gaiety with another, is their whole study; till, in a very short time, nothing remains but to tread the same beaten round; to enjoy what they have already enjoyed, and to see what they have often seen. Pleasures, thus drawn to the dregs, become vapid and tasteless. What might have pleased long, if enjoyed with temperance and mingled with retirement, being devoured with such eager haste, speedily surfeits and disgusts. Hence, these are the persons, who, after having run through a rapid course of pleasure, after having glittered for a few years in the foremost line of public amusements, are the most apt to fly at last to a melancholy retreat; not led by religion or reason, but driven by disappointed hopes, and exhausted spirits, to the pensive conclusion that *all is vanity*.

If uninterrupted intercourse with the world wear out the man of pleasure, it no less oppresses the man of business and ambition. The strongest spirits must at length sink under it. The happiest temper must be soured by incessant returns of the opposition, the inconstancy, and treachery of men. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, lives in a perpetual warfare. Here an enemy encounters; there a rival supplants him. The ingratitude of a friend stings him this hour; and the pride of a superiour wounds him the next. In vain he flies for relief to trifling amusements. These may afford a temporary opiate to care; but they communicate no strength to the mind. On the

contrary, they leave it more soft and defenceless, when molestations and injuries renew their attack.

Let him who wishes for an effectual cure to all the wounds which the world can inflict, retire from intercourse with men to intercourse with God. When he enters into his closet, and shuts the door, let him shut out, at the same time, all intrusion of worldly care; and dwell among objects divine and immortal.—Those fair prospects of order and peace shall there open to his view, which form the most perfect contrast to the confusion and misery of this earth. The celestial inhabitants quarrel not; among them there is neither ingratitude, nor envy, nor tumult. Men may harass one another; but in the kingdom of God, concord and tranquillity reign for ever.—From such objects there beams upon the mind of the pious man, a pure and enlivening light; there is diffused over his heart a holy calm. His agitated spirit re-assumes its firmness, and regains its peace. The world sinks in its importance; and the load of mortality and misery loses almost all its weight. The *green pastures* open, and the *still waters* flow around him, beside which the *Shepherd of Israel* guides his flock. The disturbances and alarms, so formidable to those who are engaged in the tumults of the world, seem to him only like thunder rolling afar off; like the noise of distant waters, whose sound he hears, whose course he traces, but whose waves touch him not.—As religious retirement is thus evidently conducive to our happiness in this life, so,

In the second place, it is absolutely necessary, in order to prepare us for the life to come. He who lives always in public, cannot live to his own soul. The world *lieth in wickedness;* and with good reason the Christian is exhorted, *not to be conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of his mind.* Our conversation and intercourse with the world is, in several respects, an education for vice. From our earliest youth we are accustomed to hear riches and honours extolled as the chief possessions of man; and proposed to us, as the principal aim of our future pursuits. We are trained up, to look with admiration on the flattering marks of distinction which they bestow. In quest of those fancied blessings, we see the multitude around us eager and fervent. Principles of duty, we may, perhaps, hear sometimes inculcated; but we seldom behold them brought into competition with worldly profit. The soft names and plausible colours, under which deceit, sensuality, and revenge, are presented to us in common discourse, weaken, by degrees, our natural sense of the distinction between good and evil. We often meet with crimes authorised by high examples, and rewarded with the caresses and smiles of the world. We discover, perhaps, at last, that those whom we are taught to reverence, and to regard as our patterns of conduct, act upon principles no purer than those of others. Thus breathing habitually, a contagious air, how certain is our ruin, unless we sometimes retreat from this pestilential region, and seek for proper correctives of the disorders which are contracted there? Religious retirement both abates the disease, and furnishes the remedy. It lessens the corrupting

influence of the world; and it gives opportunity for better principles to exert their power. He who is accustomed to turn aside, and commune with himself, will, sometimes at least, hear the truths which the multitude do not tell him. A more sound instructor will lift his voice, and awaken within the heart those latent suggestions, which the world had overpowered and suppressed.

The acts of prayer and devotion, the exercises of faith and repentance, all the great and peculiar duties of the religion of Christ, necessarily suppose retirement from the world. This was one chief end of their institution, that they might be the means of occasionally sequestering us from that great scene of vice and folly, the continued presence of which is so hurtful. Solitude is the hallowed ground which religion hath, in every age, chosen for her own. There, her inspiration is felt, and her secret mysteries elevate the soul. There, falls the tear of contrition; there, rises towards Heaven, the sigh of the heart; there, melts the soul with all the tenderness of devotion, and pours itself forth before him who made, and him who redeemed it. How can any one who is unacquainted with such employments of mind, be fit for Heaven? If Heaven be the habitation of pure affections, and of intellectual joy, can such a state be relished by him who is always immersed among sensible objects, and has never acquired any taste for the pleasures of the understanding and the heart?

The great and the worthy, the pious and the virtuous, have ever been addicted to serious retirement. It is the characteristic of little and frivolous minds to be wholly occupied with the vulgar objects of life.

These fill up their desires, and supply all the entertainment which their coarse apprehensions can relish. But a more refined and enlarged mind leaves the world behind it, feels a call for higher pleasures, and seeks them in retreat. The man of public spirit has recourse to it, in order to form plans for general good; the man of genius, in order to dwell on his favourite themes; the philosopher, to pursue his discoveries; the saint, to improve himself in grace. *Isaac went out to meditate in the fields, at the evening tide.* David, amidst all the splendour of royalty, often bears witness both to the pleasure which he received, and to the benefit which he reaped from devout meditation. *I communed with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto God's testimonies. In the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts delight my soul.* Our blessed Saviour himself, though, of all who ever lived on earth, he needed least the assistance of religious retreat, yet, by his frequent practice, has done it signal honour. Often were the garden, the mountain, and the silence of the night sought by him, for intercourse with heaven. *When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray.*

The advantages of religious retirement will still more clearly appear, by considering, as was proposed, in the next place, some of those great objects which should there employ our thoughts. I shall mention only three, which are of the most plain and acknowledged importance; God, the world, and our own character.

I. When you retire from the world, *commune with your hearts* concerning God. Impressions of Deity, besides their being the principle of what is strictly termed religion, are the great support of all moral sentiment, and virtuous conduct, among men. But with what difficulty are they preserved in any due degree of force, amidst the affairs and avocations of the world? While the crowd of surrounding objects is ever rushing on the imagination, and occupying the senses and the heart, what is not only absent from view, but, by its nature, invisible, is apt to vanish like a shadow. Hence it is given as the character of wicked men in Scripture, that they are *without God in the world.* They deny not, perhaps, that he does exist; but it is the same to them as though he did not: For having lost him from their view, his existence has no effect on their conduct. If, at any time, the idea of God arises in their mind, it rises like a terrifying phantom, which they hasten to expel, and which they gladly fancy to be unreal, because they see it makes so little impression on others around them.

Let him who retires to serious meditation, begin with impressing deeply on his mind this important truth, that there is undoubtedly a Supreme Governour, who presides over the universe. But let him not imagine that to commune with his heart concerning God, is to search into the mysteries of the Divine nature, or to attempt a discovery of the whole plan of Providence. Long enough he may bewilder himself in this maze, without making any proficiency in the practical knowledge of God. Shall he who knows so little of his own nature, or of the nature of the objects with which he is surrounded, expect to

comprehend the Being who made him? To commune with ourselves, to any useful purpose, on this subject, is to bring home to our souls the internal authoritative sense of God, as of a Sovereign and a Father. It is not to speculate about what is mysterious in his essence, but to contemplate what is displayed of his perfections. It is to realise the presence of the Supreme Being, so as to produce the most profound veneration; and to awaken the earnest desire of as near an approach as our nature will permit, to that great Fountain of happiness and life.

After this manner was that holy man affected, who uttered this ardent wish, *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!* * If with such a frame of mind you seek after God, be assured that he is not far from you; and that, though you are not permitted as yet to *come to his seat*, you may, at least, reach the footstool of his throne, and touch the robe that covers him. In the midst of your solitary musings, lift your eyes, and behold all nature full of God. Look up to the firmament, and admire his glory. Look round on the earth, and observe his presence every-where displayed. If the gay landscape, or the fruitful field, present themselves to your eye, behold him smiling upon his works. If the mountain raise its lofty head, or the expanse of waters roll its tide before you, contemplate, in those great and solemn objects, his power and majesty. Nature, in all its diversities, is a varied manifestation of the Deity. If you were to *take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*, even there you would find him. For *in*

* Job, xxii. 3.

him you live and move. He fills and animates all space. In the barren wilderness, as in the peopled region, you can trace his footsteps; and in the deepest solitude, you may hear a voice which testifies of him.

Him, indeed, you are never to confound with the workmanship of his hands. Nature, in its most awful or most pleasing scenes, exhibits no more than different forms of inanimate matter. But on these dead forms is impressed the glory of a living spirit. The beauty, or the greatness, which appears in them, flows from the Fountain of all greatness and beauty; in him it centers; of his perfection it reflects an image; and towards him should lead your view. —In conversing with a fellow-creature on earth, it is not with his body we converse, though it is his body only which we see. From his words and actions we conceive his mind; with his mind, though invisible, we hold correspondence, and direct towards this spiritual essence our affection and regard. In like manner, though here we behold no more of God than what his works display, yet, in those displays, we are capable of perceiving the universal Spirit, and of holding correspondence with this unseen Being, in veneration, gratitude, and love.

It is thus that a pious man, in his retired meditations, viewing natural objects with a spiritual eye, communes with his heart concerning God. He walks among the various scenes of nature, as within the precincts of a great temple, in the habitual exercise of devotion. To those discoveries of the Supreme Being in his works, let him apply the comment of his word. From the world of Nature let him follow God into the world of Grace. When conducted from the outer courts into this inmost sanctuary of

the temple, he shall feel himself brought still more nigh to the Sacred Presence. In the great plan of Divine Wisdom, for extirpating the evils produced by sin, he shall receive the interpretation of many of the hidden mysteries of Nature. He shall discover in Christ, the Deity made, in some degree, visible to sense. In the beneficent works which he performed, and the gracious undertaking which he accomplished, he shall behold *the brightness of the Father's glory*, and shall discern it to be *full of grace and truth.*—From the sacred retreat wherein his thoughts have been thus employed, he returns to the world like a superiour being. He carries into active life those pure and elevating sentiments to which the giddy crowd are strangers. A certain odour of sanctity remains upon his mind, which, for a while at least, will repel the contagion of the world.

II. COMMUNE with your heart, in the season of retirement concerning the world. The world is the great deceiver, whose fallacious arts it highly imports us to detect. But, in the midst of its pleasures and pursuits, the detection is impossible. We tread, as within an enchanted circle, where nothing appears as it truly is. It is only in retreat that the charm can be broken. Did men employ that retreat, not in carrying on the delusions which the world has begun, not in forming plans of imaginary bliss, but in subjecting the happiness which the world affords to a strict discussion, the spell would dissolve; and in the room of the unreal prospects which had long amused them, the nakedness of the world would appear.

Prepare yourselves, then, to encounter the light of

truth. Resolve rather to bear the disappointment of some flattering hopes, than to wander for ever in the paradise of fools. While others meditate in secret on the means of attaining worldly success, let it be your employment to scrutinize that success itself. Calculate fairly to what it amounts; and whether you are not losers, on the whole, by your apparent gain. Look back for this purpose on your past life. Trace it from your earliest youth; and put the question to yourselves, What have been its happiest periods? Were they those of quiet and innocence, or those of ambition and intrigue? Has your real enjoyment uniformly kept pace with what the world calls prosperity? As you are advanced in wealth or station, did you proportionably advance in happiness? Has success, almost in any one instance, fulfilled your expectation? Where you reckoned upon most enjoyment, have you not often found least? Wherever guilt entered into your pleasures, did not its sting long remain, after the gratification was past?—— Such questions as these, candidly answered, would, in a great measure, unmask the world. They would expose the vanity of its pretensions; and convince you, that there are other springs than those which the world affords, to which you must apply for happiness.

While you commune with your heart concerning what the world now is, consider also what it will one day appear to be. Anticipate the awful moment of your bidding it an eternal farewell. Think, what reflections shall most probably arise when you are quitting the field, and looking back on the scene of action. In what light will your closing eyes contemplate those vanities which now shine so bright, and

those interests which now swell into such high importance? What part will you then wish to have acted? What shall then appear momentous, what trifling, in human conduct? — Let the sober sentiments which such anticipations suggest, temper now your misplaced ardour. Let the last conclusions which you shall form, enter into the present estimate which you make of the world, and of life.

Moreover, in communing with yourselves concerning the world, contemplate it as subject to the Divine dominion. The greater part of men behold nothing more than the rotation of human affairs. They see a great crowd ever in motion; the fortunes of men alternately rising and falling; virtue often distressed, and prosperity appearing to be the purchase of worldly wisdom. But this is only the outside of things. Behind the curtain there is a far greater scene, which is beheld by none but the retired religious spectator. Lift up that curtain, when you are alone with God. View the world with the eye of a Christian; and you shall see, that while *man's heart deviseth his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps.* You shall see, that however men appear to move and act after the their own pleasure, they are, nevertheless, retained in secret bonds by the Almighty, and all their operations rendered subservient to the ends of his moral government. You shall behold him obliging *the wrath of man to praise him;* punishing the sinner by means of his own iniquities; from the trials of the righteous, bringing forth their reward; and to a state of seeming universal confusion, preparing the wisest and most equitable issue. While the *fashion of this world* is passing fast away, you shall discern the glory of another rising to succeed it. You shall

behold all human events, our griefs and our joys, our love and our hatred, our character and our memory, absorbed in the ocean of eternity; and no trace of our present existence left, except its being for ever *well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked.* —— Such a view of the world, frequently presented to our minds, could not fail to enforce those solemn conclusions; *There is no wisdom, nor counsel against the Lord. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

III. COMMUNE with your heart concerning yourselves, and your real character. To acquire a thorough knowledge of ourselves is an attainment no less difficult than important. For men are generally unwilling to see their own imperfections; and when they are willing to inquire into them, their self-love imposes on their judgment. Their intercourse with one another assists the delusion to which, of themselves, they are prone. For the ordinary commerce of the world is a commerce of flattery and falsehood; where reciprocally they deceive and are deceived, where every one appears under an assumed form, professes esteem which he does not feel, and bestows praise in order to receive it. It is only in retreat where those false semblances disappear, and those flattering voices are silent, that a man can learn to *think soberly of himself, and as he ought to think.*

It has been said, that there are three characters which every man sustains; and these often extremely different from one another: One, which he possesses in his own opinion; another, which he carries in the

estimation of the world; and a third, which he bears in the judgment of God. It is only the last which ascertains what he really is. — Whether the character which the world forms of you be above or below the truth, it imports you not much to know. But it is of eternal consequence, that the character, which you possess in your own eyes, be formed upon that which you bear in the sight of God. In order to try it by this great standard, you must lay aside, as much as possible, all partiality to yourselves; and in the season of retirement, explore your heart with such accurate scrutiny, as may bring your hidden defects to light.

Inquire, for this purpose, whether you be not conscious, that the fair opinion which the world entertains of you, is founded on their partial knowledge both of your abilities and your virtues? Would you be willing that all your actions should be publicly canvassed? Could you bear to have your thoughts laid open? Are there no parts of your life which you would be uneasy if an enemy could discover? In what light, then, must these appear to God? When you have kept free of vice, has your innocence proceeded from purity of principle, or from worldly motives? Rise there no envy or malignity within you, when you compare your own condition with that of others? Have you been as solicitous to regulate your heart, as to preserve your manners from reproach? Professing yourselves to be Christians, has the spirit of Christ appeared in your conduct? Declaring that you hope for immortality, has that hope surmounted undue attachments to the present life?

Such investigation as this, seriously pursued, might

produce to every man many discoveries of himself; discoveries not pleasing perhaps to vanity, but salutary and useful. For he can be only a flatterer, but no true friend to himself, who aims not at knowing his own defects as well as virtues. By imposing on the world, he may carry on some plan of fancied profit; but by imposing on his heart, what can he propose to gain? *He feedeth on ashes: A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand.* *

THUS, I have set before you some of those great objects which ought to employ your meditation in religious retirement. I have endeavoured to introduce you into a proper intercourse with your heart, concerning God, the world, and your own character. Let this intercourse terminate in fixing the principles of your future conduct. Let it serve to introduce consistency into your life. Nothing can be more wavering and disjointed, than the behaviour of those who are wholly men of the world, and have never been inured to commune with themselves. Dissipation is a more frequent cause of their ruin, than determined impiety. It is not so much because they have adopted bad principles, as because they have never attended to principles of any kind, that their lives are so full of incoherence and disorder. — You hover on the borders of sin and duty. One day you read the Scriptures, you hear religious discourses, and form good resolutions. Next day you plunge into the world, and forget the serious impression, as if it had never been made. The impression is again

* Isaiah, xliv. 20.

renewed, and again effaced; and in this circle your life revolves. Is such conduct worthy of creatures endowed with intelligent powers? Shall the close of life overtake you, before you have determined how to live? Shall the day never come, that is to find you steady in your views, decided in your plans, and engaged in a course of action which your mind approves? If you wish that day ever to arrive, retirement and meditation must first bring you home to yourselves, from the dissipation in which you are now scattered; must teach you to fix such aims, and to lay down such rules of conduct as are suitable to rational and immortal beings. Then will your character become uniform and respectable. Then you may hope that your life will proceed in such a train as shall prepare you, when it is finished, for joining the society of more exalted spirits.

SERMON X.

On Devotion.

Acts, x. 2.

Cornelius —— a devout man —

THAT religion is essential to the welfare of man, can be proved by the most convincing arguments. But these, how demonstrative soever, are insufficient to support its authority over human conduct. For arguments may convince the understanding, when they cannot conquer the passions. Irresistible they seem in the calm hours of retreat; but in the season of action, they often vanish into smoke. There are other and more powerful springs, which influence the great movements of the human frame. In order to operate with success on the active powers, the heart must be gained. Sentiment and affection must be brought to the aid of reason. It is not enough that men believe religion to be a wise and rational rule of conduct, unless they relish it as agreeable, and find it to carry its own reward. Happy is the man, who, in the conflict of desire between God and the world, can oppose not only argument to argument, but pleasure to pleasure; who, to the external allurements of sense, can oppose the internal joys of devotion; and to the uncertain promises of a flattering world, the certain experience of that *peace of God which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart.* — Such is the temper and spirit of *a de-*

vout man. Such was the character of Cornelius, that good centurion, whose *prayers and alms* are said to have *come up in memorial before God.* Of this character, I intend, through Divine assistance, to discourse; and shall endeavour, I. To explain the nature of devotion; II. To justify and recommend it; and, III. To rectify some mistakes concerning it.

I. DEVOTION is the lively exercise of those affections, which we owe to the Supreme Being. It comprehends several emotions of the heart, which all terminate on the same great object. The chief of them are veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation.

It implies, first, profound veneration of God. By veneration, I understand an affection compounded of awe and love, the affection which, of all others, it best becomes creatures to bear towards their infinitely perfect Creator. Awe is the first sentiment that rises in the soul at the view of his greatness. But, in the heart of a devout man, it is a solemn and elevating, not a dejecting emotion; for he glows, rather than trembles, in the Divine presence. It is not the superstitious dread of unknown power, but the homage yielded by the heart, to him who is, at once, the greatest and the best of Beings. Omnipotence, viewed alone, would be a formidable object. But, considered in conjunction with the moral perfections of the Divine nature, it serves to heighten devotion. Goodness affects the heart with double energy, when residing in one so exalted. The goodness which we adore in him, is not like that which is common among men, a weak, mutable, undiscerning fondness, ill qualified to be the ground of

assured trust. It is the goodness of a perfect Governour, acting upon a regular extensive plan; a steady principle of benevolence, conducted by wisdom; which, subject to no *variableness or shadow of turning*, free from all partiality and caprice, incapable of being either soothed by flattery or ruffled by resentment, resembles, in its calm and equal lustre, the eternal serenity of the highest heavens. *Thy mercy, O Lord! is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, and thy judgments are a great depth.*

Such are the conceptions of the great God, which fill with veneration the heart of a devout man. His veneration is not confined to acts of immediate worship. It is the habitual temper of his soul. Not only when engaged in prayer or praise, but in the silence of retirement, and even amidst the occupations of the world, the Divine Being dwells upon his thoughts. No place, and no object, appears to him void of God. On the works of Nature he views the impression of his hand; and in the actions of men, he traces the operation of his Providence. Whatever he beholds on earth, that is beautiful or fair, that is great or good, he refers to God, as to the supreme origin of all the excellence which is scattered throughout his works. From those effects he rises to the first cause. From those streams he ascends to the fountain whence they flow. By those rays he is led to that eternal source of light in which they centre.

Devotion implies, secondly, sincere gratitude to God for all his benefits. This is a warmer emotion than simple veneration. Veneration looks up to the

Deity, as he is in himself: Gratitude regards what he is towards us. When a devout man surveys this vast universe, where beauty and goodness are every where predominant; when he reflects on those numberless multitudes of creatures who, in their different stations, enjoy the blessings of existence; and when, at the same time, he looks up to an universal Father, who hath thus filled creation with life and happiness, his heart glows within him. He adores that disinterested goodness which prompted the Almighty to raise up so many orders of intelligent beings, not that he might receive, but that he might give and impart; that he might pour forth himself, and communicate to the spirits which he formed, some emanations of his felicity.

The goodness of this Supreme Benefactor he gratefully contemplates, as displayed in his own state. He reviews the events of his life; and in every comfort which has sweetened it, he discerns the Divine hand. Does he remember with affection the parents under whose care he grew up, and the companions with whom he passed his youthful life? Is he now happy, in his family rising around him; in the spouse who loves him, or in the children who give him comfort and joy? Into every tender remembrance of the past, and every pleasing enjoyment of the present, devotion enters; for in all those beloved objects, it recognizes God. The communication of love from heart to heart, is an effusion of his goodness. From his inspiration descends all the friendship which ever glowed on earth; and therefore, to him it justly returns in gratitude, and terminates on him.

But this life, with all its interests, is but a small part of human existence. A devout man looks for-

ward to immortality, and discovers still higher subjects of gratitude. He views himself as a guilty creature, whom Divine benignity has received into grace; whose forfeited hopes it has restored; and to whom it has opened the most glorious prospects of future felicity. Such generosity shewn to the fallen and miserable, is yet more affecting to the heart, than favours conferred on the innocent. He contemplates, with astonishment, the labours of the Son of God, in accomplishing redemption for men; and his soul overflows with thankfulness to him, *who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. — What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving kindness, and with tender mercies.*

Devotion implies, thirdly, the desire of the soul after the favour of the Supreme Being, as its chief good and final rest. To inferior enjoyments, the devout man allots inferior and secondary attachment. He disclaims not every earthly affection. He pretends not to renounce all pleasure in the comforts of his present state. Such an unnatural renunciation humanity forbids, and religion cannot require. But from these he expects not his supreme bliss. He discerns the vanity which belongs to them all; and beyond the circle of mutable objects which surround him, he aspires after some principles of more perfect felicity, which shall not be subject to change or decay. But where is this complete and permanent good to be found? Ambition pursues it in courts and palaces; and returns from the pursuit, loaded

with sorrows. Pleasure seeks it among sensual joys; and retires with the confession of disappointment. *The deep saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith, it is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. Its place is not in the land of the living.* True happiness dwells with God; and from *the light of his countenance*, it beams upon the devout man. His voice is, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* After exploring heaven and earth for happiness, they seem to him a mighty void, a wilderness of shadows, where all would be empty and unsubstantial without God. But in his favour and love, he finds what supplies every defect of temporal objects; and assures tranquillity to his heart, amidst all the changes of his existence. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and thou shalt receive me to thy glory. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

From these sentiments and affections, Devotion advances, fourthly, to an entire resignation of the soul to God. It is the consummation of trust and hope. It banishes anxious cares and murmuring thoughts. It reconciles us to every appointment of Divine Providence; and resolves every wish into the desire of pleasing him whom our hearts adore. Its genuine breathings are to this effect. "Conduct me, "O God! in what path soever seemeth good to "thee. In nothing shall I ever arraign thy sacred "will. Dost thou require me to part with any "worldly advantages, for the sake of virtue and a "good conscience? I give them up. Dost thou

"command me to relinquish my friends, or my "country? At thy call I cheerfully leave them. "Dost thou summon me away from this world? Lo! "I am ready to depart. Thou hast made, thou hast "redeemed me, and I am thine. Myself, and all "that belongs to me, I surrender to thy disposal. "Let the men of the world have *their portion in this* "*life*. Be it mine, *to behold thy face in righteous-* "*ness; and when I awake to be satisfied with thy* "*likeness*."

This, surely, is one of the noblest acts of which the human mind is capable, when thus, if we may be allowed the expression, it unites itself with God. Nor can any devotion be genuine, which inspires not sentiments of this nature. For devotion is not to be considered as a transient glow of affection, occasioned by some casual impressions of Divine goodness, which are suffered to remain unconnected with the conduct of life. It is a powerful principle, which penetrates the soul; which purifies the affections from debasing attachments: and, by a fixed and steady regard to God, subdues every sinful passion, and forms the inclinations to piety and virtue.

SUCH, in general are the dispositions that constitute devotion. It is the union of veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation. It expresses not so much the performance of any particular duty, as the spirit which must animate all religious duties. It stands opposed not merely to downright vice; but to a heart which is cold and insensible to sacred things; which, from compulsion perhaps, and a sense of interest, preserves some regard to the Divine

commands, but obeys them without ardour, love, or joy. I proceed,

II. To recommend this devout spirit to your imitation. I begin with observing, That it is of the utmost consequence to guard against extremes of every kind in religion. We must beware, lest, by seeking to avoid one rock, we split upon another. It has been long the subject of remark, that superstition and enthusiasm are two capital sources of delusion; superstition, on the one hand, attaching men with immoderate zeal to the ritual and external part of religion; and enthusiasm, on the other, directing their whole attention to internal emotions, and mystical communications with the spiritual world; while neither the one nor the other has paid sufficient regard to the great moral duties of the Christian life. But, running with intemperate eagerness from these two great abuses of religion, men have neglected to observe, that there are extremes opposite to each of them, into which they are in hazard of precipitating themselves. Thus, the horrour of superstition has sometimes reached so far as to produce contempt for all external institutions; as if it were possible for religion to subsist in the world, without forms of worship, or public acknowledgment of God. It has also happened that some, who, in the main, are well affected to the cause of goodness, observing that persons of a devout turn have at times been carried, by warm affections, into unjustifiable excesses, have thence hastily concluded that all devotion was a-kin to enthusiasm; and separating religion totally from the heart and affections, have reduced it to a frigid observance of what they call the rules of virtue. This

is the extreme which I purpose at present to combat, by shewing you, first, That true devotion is rational, and well-founded; next, That it is of the highest importance to every other part of religion and virtue; and lastly, That it is most conducive to our happiness.

In the first place, True devotion is rational, and well-founded. It takes its rise from affections, which are essential to the human frame. We are formed by Nature to admire what is great, and to love what is amiable. Even inanimate objects have power to excite those emotions. The magnificent prospects of the natural world, fill the mind with reverential awe. Its beautiful scenes create delight. When we survey the actions and behaviour of our fellow-creatures, the affections glow with greater ardour; and if to be unmoved, in the former case, argues a defect of sensibility in our powers, it discovers, in the latter, an odious hardness and depravity in the heart. The tenderness of an affectionate parent, the generosity of a forgiving enemy, the public spirit of a patriot or a hero, often fill the eyes with tears, and swell the breast with emotions too big for utterance. The object of those affections is frequently raised above us, in condition and rank. Let us suppose him raised also above us in nature. Let us imagine, that an angel or any being of superior order, had condescended to be our friend, our guide, and patron; no person, sure, would hold the exaltation of his benefactor's character to be an argument why he should love and revere him less. — Strange! that the attachment and veneration, the warmth and overflowing of heart, which excellence and goodness on

every other occasion command, should begin to be accounted irrational, as soon as the Supreme Being becomes their object. For what reason must human sensibility be extinct towards him alone? Are all benefits entitled to gratitude, except the highest and the best? Shall goodness cease to be amiable, only because it is perfect?

It will, perhaps, be said that an unknown and invisible being is not qualified to raise affection in the human heart. Wrapt up in the mysterious obscurity of his nature, he escapes our search, and affords no determinate object to our love or desire. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see* * *him.* —— Notwithstanding this obscurity, is there any being in the universe more real and certain, than the Creator of the world, and the Supporter of all existence? Is he, in whom we live and move, too distant from us to excite devotion? His form and essence, indeed, we cannot see; but to be unseen, and imperfectly known, in many other instances, precludes neither gratitude nor love. It is not the sight, so much as the strong conception, or deep impression, of an object, which affects the passions. We glow with admiration of personages, who have lived in a distant age. Whole nations have been transported with zeal and affection for the generous hero, or public deliverer, whom they knew only by fame. Nay, properly speaking, the direct object of our love is, in every case, invisible, For that on which affection is placed, is the mind, the soul, the

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9.

internal character of our fellow-creatures; which surely, is no less concealed, than the Divine Nature itself is, from the view of sense. From actions, we can only infer the dispositions of men; from what we see of their behaviour, we collect what is invisible; but the conjecture which we form is, at best, imperfect; and when their actions excite our love, much of their heart remains still unknown. I ask, then, in what respect God is less qualified than any other being to be an object of affection? Convinced that he exists; beholding his goodness spread abroad in his works, exerted in the government of the world, displayed in some measure to sense, in the actions of his son Jesus Christ! are we not furnished with every essential requisite which the heart demands, in order to indulge the most warm, and at the same time the most rational emotions?

If these considerations justify the reasonableness of devotion, as expressed in veneration, love, and gratitude, the same train of thought will equally justify it when appearing in the forms of desire, delight, or resignation. The latter are, indeed, the consequence of the former. For we cannot but desire some communication with what we love; and will naturally resign ourselves to one, on whom we have placed the full confidence of affection. The aspirations of a devout man after the favour of God, are the effects of that earnest wish for happiness which glows in every breast. All men have somewhat that may be called the object of their devotion; reputation, pleasure, learning, riches, or whatever apparent good has strongly attached their heart. This becomes the centre of attraction, which draws them towards it; which quickens and regulates all their motions. While the men of the world are thus

influenced by the objects which they severally worship, shall he only who directs all his devotion towards the Supreme Being, be excluded from a place in the system of rational conduct? or be censured for having passions, whose sensibility corresponds to the great cause which moves them? — Having vindicated the reasonableness of devotion, I come,

In the second place, to shew its importance, and the high place which it possesses in the system of religion. I address myself now to those, who, though they reject not devotion as irrational, yet consider it as an unnecessary refinement; an attainment which may be safely left to recluse and sequestered persons, who aim at uncommon sanctity. The solid and material duties of a good life, they hold to be in a great measure independent of devout affection; and think them sufficiently supported, by their necessary connexion with our interest, both in this and in a future world. They insist much upon religion being a calm, a sober, and rational principle of conduct. —— I admit that it is very laudable to have a rational religion. But I must admonish you, that it is both reproachful and criminal, to have an insensible heart. If we reduce religion into so cool a state, as not to admit love, affection, and desire, we shall leave it in possession of small influence over human life. Look abroad into the world, and observe how few act upon deliberate and rational views of their true interest. The bulk of mankind are impelled by their feelings. They are attracted by appearances of good. Taste and inclination rule their conduct. To direct their inclination and taste towards the highest objects; to form a relish within them, for virtuous and spiritual

enjoyment; to introduce religion into the heart, is the province of devotion; and hence arises its importance to the interests of goodness.

Agreeably to this doctrine, the great Author of our religion, who well *knew what was in man*, laid the foundation of his whole system in the regeneration of the heart. The change which was to be accomplished on his followers, he did not purpose to effect, merely by regulating their external conduct; but by forming within them a new nature; by *taking away the heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh;* that is, a heart relenting and tender, yielding to the Divine impulse, and readily susceptible of devout impressions. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: This is the first and great commandment. My son, give me thy heart*, is the call of God to each of us: And, indeed, if the heart be withheld, it is not easy to conceive what other offering we can present, that will be acceptable to him.

Of what nature must that man's religion be, who professes to worship God, and to believe in Christ; and yet raises his thoughts towards God, and his Saviour, without any warmth of gratitude or love? I speak not of those occasional decays of pious affection, to which the best are subject, but of a total insensibility to this part of religion. Surely, let the outward behaviour be ever so irreproachable, there must be some essential defect in a heart which remains always unmoved at the view of infinite goodness. The affections cannot, in this case, be deemed to flow in their natural channel. Some concealed malignity must have tainted the inward frame. This is not the man whom you would choose for your

bosom friend; or whose heart you could expect to answer, with reciprocal warmth, to yours. His virtue, if it deserve that name, is not of the most amiable sort; and may, with reason, receive the appellation (often injudiciously bestowed) of cold and dry morality. Such a person must, as yet, be *far from the kingdom of Heaven.*

As devotion is thus essential to religion in its principle, so it enters into the proper discharge of all its duties. It diffuses an auspicious influence over the whole of virtue. The prevailing temper of the mind is formed by its most frequent employments. Intercourse with Supreme perfection cannot, therefore, but ennoble and improve it. The pure love of God naturally connects itself with the love of man. Hence, devotion has been often found a powerful instrument in humanizing the manners of men, and taming their unruly passions. It smooths what is rough, and softens what is fierce in our nature. It is the great purifier of the affections. It inspires contempt of the low gratifications belonging to animal life. It promotes a humble and cheerful contentment with our lot; and subdues that eager desire of riches and of power which has filled this unhappy world with crimes and misery. Finally it bestows that enlargement of heart in the service of God, which is the great principle both of perseverance, and of progress in virtue. He who, unacquainted with devout affections, sets himself to keep the Divine commandments, will advance in obedience with a slow and languid pace; like one, who, carrying a heavy burden, toils to mount the hill. But he whose heart devotion has warmed, will proceed on his way, cheerful and rejoicing. The one performs his duty,

only because it is commanded; the other, because he loves it. The one is inclined to do no more than necessity requires; the other seeks to excel. The one looks for his reward in somewhat besides religion; the other finds it in religion itself: It is *his meat and drink to do the will of that heavenly Father*, whom he loves and adores. Which of these two is likely to make the greatest improvement in goodness, is easily discerned. Let us now consider,

In the third place, the influence of devotion on the happiness of life. Whatever promotes and strengthens virtue, whatever calms and regulates the temper, is a source of happiness. Devotion, as I have just now shown, produces those effects in a remarkable degree. It inspires composure of spirit, mildness, and benignity; weakens the painful, and cherishes the pleasing emotions; and, by these means, carries on the life of a pious man, in a smooth and placid tenour.

Besides exerting this habitual influence on the mind, devotion opens a field of enjoyments, to which the vicious are entire strangers; enjoyments the more valuable, as they peculiarly belong to retirement when the world leaves us, and to adversity when it becomes our foe. These are the two seasons, for which every wise man would most wish to provide some hidden store of comfort. For let him be placed in the most favourable situation which the human state admits, the world can neither always amuse him, nor always shield him from distress. There will be many hours of vacuity, and many of dejection in his life. If he be a stranger to God, and to devotion, how dreary will the gloom of solitude often prove! With what

oppressive weight will sickness, disappointment, or old age, fall upon his spirits! But, for those pensive periods, the pious man has a relief prepared. From the tiresome repetition of the common vanities of life, or from the painful corrosion of its cares and sorrows, devotion transports him into a new region; and surrounds him there with such objects as are the most fitted to cheer the dejection, to calm the tumults, and to heal the wounds of his heart. If the world has been empty and delusive, it gladdens him with the prospect of a higher and better order of things about to arise. If men have been ungrateful and base, it displays before him the faithfulness of that Supreme Being, who, though every other friend fail, will never forsake him. Consult your experience, and you will find, that the two greatest sources of inward joy are, the exercise of love directed towards a deserving object, and the exercise of hope terminating on some high and assured happiness. Both these are supplied by devotion; and therefore we have no reason to be surprised, if on some occasions, it fill the hearts of good men with a satisfaction not to be expressed.

The refined pleasures of a pious mind, are, in many respects, superiour to the coarse gratifications of sense. They are pleasures which belong to the highest powers and best affections of the soul; whereas the gratifications of sense reside in the lowest region of our nature. To the one, the soul stoops below its native dignity. The other raise it above itself. The one leave always a comfortless, often a mortifying remembrance behind them. The other are reviewed with applause and delight. The pleasures of sense resemble a foaming torrent, which, after a disorderly course, speedily runs out,

and leaves an empty and offensive channel. But the pleasures of devotion resemble the equable current of a pure river, which enlivens the fields through which it passes, and diffuses verdure and fertility along its banks. To thee, O Devotion! we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls, in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only, are imparted to the low, no less than to the high; to the poor as well as to the rich. In thy presence worldly distinctions cease; and under thy influence, worldly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable; inaccessible only to the unrighteous and impure. Thou beginnest on earth, the temper of Heaven. In thee, the hosts of angels and blessed spirits eternally rejoice. It now remains,

III. To endeavour to correct some errours into which men are apt to fall concerning devotion. For it is but too obvious, that errours are often committed in this part of religion. These frequently disfigure its appearance before the world, and subject it to unjust reproach. Let us therefore attend deliberately to its nature, so as to distinguish pure and rational devotion, of which I have hitherto treated, from that which is, in any degree, spurious and adulterated.

In the first place, It is an errour to place devotion in the mere performance of any external act of wor-

ship. Prayer and praise, together with the ordinances peculiar to the Christian religion, are the appointed means of raising the heart towards the Supreme Being. They are the instituted signs of devotion; the language in which it naturally expresses itself. But let us remember, that they are signs and expressions only; and we all know, that, in various cases, these may not correspond to the thing signified. It is in the disposition of the heart, not in the motion of the lips, or in posture of the body, that devotion consists. The heart may pray, or praise, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be unconcerned or ill affected, all the words we can utter, how properly framed soever, are no other than empty and unacceptable sounds in the ear of the Almighty.

In the second place, it is an errour to conceive the pleasures and advantages of devotion to be indiscriminately open to all. Devotion, like many parts of religion, may in some lights be considered as a privilege, and in others as a duty. It is the duty of all, to love God, and to resign themselves to his will. But it is the privilege of good men only, to rejoice in God, and to confide in his friendship. Hence a certain preparation is requisite, for the enjoyment of devotion in its whole extent. Not only must the life be reformed from gross enormities, but the heart must have undergone that change which the Gospel demands. A competent knowledge of God must be acquired. A proper foundation must be laid in faith and repentance, for intercourse with Heaven.

They who would rush all at once from the arms of the world, into the sacred retreat of devotion; they who imagine that retreat to stand always ready for

the reception of such as betake themselves to it, for no reason, but because every other refuge excludes them, betray gross ignorance of this part of religion. They bring to it, faculties unqualified to taste its pleasures; and they grasp at hopes, to which they are not intitled. By incorporating with devotion the unnatural mixture of their unsanctified passions, they defile and corrupt it. Hence that gloom which has often spread over it? Hence those superstitious mortifications and austerities, by which the falsely devout hope to purchase favour from God; haunted by the terrours of a guilty conscience, and vainly struggling to substitute a servile and cringing homage, in the room of the pure affections of a renewed heart. On such altars the hallowed fire of true devotion cannot burn; nor can any incense ascend from them, that shall be grateful to Heaven. *Bring no more vain oblations. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, saith the Lord. Cease to do evil; learn to do well.* Then *draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*—— But though devotion requires a pure heart, and a virtuous life, and necessarily supposes the exercise of frequent retirement, I must observe,

In the third place, That it is an errour to conceive it as requiring an entire retreat from the world. Devotion, like every other branch of religion, was intended to fit us for discharging the duties of life. We serve God, by being useful to one another. It is evident from the frame of our nature, and from our common necessities and wants, that we were designed by Providence for an active part on this earth. The Gospel of Christ, accordingly considers us as

engaged in the concerns of the world; and directs its exhortations to men, in all the various relations, characters, and employments of civil life. Abstraction from society, therefore, and total dedication of our time to devout exercises, cannot be the most proper method of acquiring the favour of God.

I mean not, however, to throw any blame on those, who, having lost all relish for the ordinary pursuits of life, in consequence of severe wounds which they have received from affliction; who, being left to stand alone, and discerning their connections with the world, to be in some measure broken off, choose to seek tranquillity in a religious retirement, and to consecrate their days entirely to God. Situations sometimes occur, which both justify a great degree of retreat from the world, and entitle it to respect. But with regard to the bulk of mankind, Christian devotion neither requires nor implies any such sequestration from the affairs of men. Nay, for the most part it will be cultivated with greater success, by those who mingle it with the active employments of life. For the mind, when entirely occupied by any one object, is in hazard of viewing it at last through a false medium. Objects especially so great and sublime as those of devotion, when we attempt to fix upon them unremitting attention, overstretch and disorder our feeble powers. The mind, by being relaxed, returns to them with more advantage. As none of our organs can bear intense sensations without injury; as the eye, when dazzled with overpowering light, beholds imaginary colours, and loses the real distinction of objects; so the mind, when overheated by perpetual contemplation of celestial things, has been sometimes found to

mistake the strong impressions of fancy, for supernatural communications from above. To the employments of devotion, as to all other things, there are due limits. There is a certain temperate sphere, within which it preserves longest its proper exertion, and most successfully promotes the purposes for which it was designed.

In the fourth place, It is an errour to imagine, that devotion enjoins a total contempt of all the pleasures and amusements of human society. It checks, indeed, that spirit of dissipation which is too prevalent. It not only prohibits pleasures which are unlawful, but likewise that unlawful degree of attachment to pleasures in themselves innocent, which withdraws the attention of man from what is serious and important. But it brings amusement under due limitation, without extirpating it. It forbids it as the business, but permits it as the relaxation, of life. For there is nothing in the spirit of true religion, which is hostile to a cheerful enjoyment of our situation in the world.

They who look with a severe and indignant eye upon all the recreations by which the cares of men are relieved, and the union of society is cemented, are, in two respects, injurious to religion. First, they exhibit it to others, under a forbidding form, by clothing it with the garb of so much unnecessary austerity, And next, they deprive the world of the benefit which their example might afford, in drawing the line between innocent and dangerous pleasures. By a temperate participation of those which are innocent they might successfully exert that autho-

rity which a virtuous and respectable character always possesses, in restraining undue excess. They would shew the young and unwary, at what point they ought to stop. They would have it in their power to regulate, in some degree, the public manners; to check extravagance, to humble presumption, and put vice to the blush. But, through injudicious severity, they fall short of the good they might perform. By an indiscriminate censure of all amusement, they detract from the weight of their reproof, when amusement becomes undoubtedly sinful. By totally withdrawing themselves from the circle of cheerful life, they deliver up the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and the corrupted; and permit the blind power of fashion, uncontrolled, to establish its own standards, and to exercise its dangerous sway over the world.

In the fifth place, It is an errour to believe, that devotion nourishes a spirit of severity, in judging of the manners and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world, that, with too many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour and recluse bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces which it imprints on the mind, are candour and humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius is unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance for others which humanity can suggest. It claims no privilege of looking into their hearts, or of deciding

with respect to their eternal state.—If your supposed devotion produce contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and acrimony into your speech; you may conclude, that, under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And, if ever it shall so far lift you up with self-conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole Christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them; you may rest assured, that to much pride you have joined much ignorance, both of the nature of devotion, and of the Gospel of Christ. Finally,

In the sixth place, It is an errour to think, that perpetual rapture and spiritual joy belong to devotion. Devout feelings admit very different degrees of warmth and exaltation. Some persons, by the frame of their minds, are much more susceptible than others of the tender emotions. They more readily relent at the view of divine goodness, glow with a warmer ardour of love, and, by consequence, rise to a higher elevation of joy and hope. But, in the midst of still and calm affections, devotion often dwells; and, though it produce no transports in the mind, diffuses over it a steady serenity. Devout sensations not only vary in their degree, according to the frame of different tempers; but, even among the best disposed, suffer much interruption and decay. It were too much to expect, that, in the present state of human frailty, those happy feelings should be uniform and constant. Oppression of worldly cares, languor of spirits, and infirmities of health,

frequently indispose us for the enjoyment of devout affections. Pious men, on these occasions, are in hazard of passing judgment on their own state with too much severity; as if, for some great iniquity, they were condemned by God to final hardness of heart. Hence arises that melancholy, which has been seen to overcloud them; and which has given occasion to many contemptuous scoffs of ungodly men. But it is a melancholy which deserves to be treated with tenderness, not with contempt. It is the excess of virtuous and pious sensibility. It is the overflowing of a heart affected, in an extreme degree, with the humble sense of its own failings, and with ardent concern to attain the favour of God. A weakness, however, we admit it to be, though not a crime; and hold it to be perfectly separable from the essence of devotion. For contrition, though it may melt, ought not to sink or overpower the heart of a Christian. The tear of repentance brings its own relief. Religion is a spring of consolation, not of terrour, to every well-informed mind, which, in a proper manner, rests its hope on the infinite goodness of God, and the all-sufficient merit of Christ.

To conclude. Let us remove from devotion all those mistakes, to which the corruptions of men, or their ignorance and prejudices, have given rise. With us, let it be the worship of God, *in spirit and in truth;* the elevation of the soul towards him in simplicity and love. Let us pursue it as the principle of virtuous conduct, and of inward peace; by frequent and serious meditation on the great objects of religion, let us lay ourselves open to its

influence. By means of the institutions of the Gospel, let us cherish its impressions. And, above all, let us pray to God, that he may establish its power in our hearts. For here, if any where, his assistance is requisite. The spirit of devotion is his gift. From his inspiration it proceeds. Towards him it tends; and in his presence, hereafter, it shall attain its full perfection.

SERMON XI.

On the Duties of the Young.

Titus, ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort, to be sober-minded.

SOBRIETY of mind is one of those virtues which the present condition of human life strongly inculcates. The uncertainty of its enjoyments checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilance, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. To them, therefore, the admonition in the Text is, with great propriety, directed; though there is reason to fear, that by them it is in hazard of being least regarded. Experience enforces the admonition on the most giddy, after they have advanced in years. But the whole state of youthful views and passions, is adverse to sobriety of mind. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world, are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young gild every opening prospect. The field of hope appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush with inconsiderate ardour: Prompt

to decide, and to choose; averse to hesitate, or to inquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment. Hence arise the perils, of which it is my design at present to warn them. I shall take *sobriety of mind*, in its most comprehensive sense, as including the whole of that discipline which religion and virtue prescribe to youth. Though the words of the Text are directly addressed to *young men*, yet as the same admonition is given in a preceding verse to the other sex, the instructions which arise from the Text are to be considered as common to both. I intend, first, to shew them the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to their conduct; and, next, to point out those virtues which they ought chiefly to cultivate.

As soon as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive that there is a right and a wrong in human actions. You see, that those who are born with the same advantages of fortune, are not all equally prosperous in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world, and pass their days with comfort and honour; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a disgrace to their friends, and a burden on society. Early then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part which you are to act, that your welfare or unhappiness, your honour or infamy, depend. Now, when beginning

to act that part, what can be of greater moment than to regulate your plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal or irretrievable errours? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up, at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen to any counsellor but humour, or to attend to any pursuit except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you, what can you expect to follow from such beginnings? While so many around you are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not those consequences extend to you? Shall you attain success without that preparation, and escape dangers without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when, to the rest of mankind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care?—— Deceive not yourselves with such arrogant hopes. Whatever be your rank, Providence will not, for your sake, reverse its established order. The Author of your being hath enjoined you to *take heed to your ways; to ponder the paths of your feet; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* He hath decreed, that they only *who seek after wisdom shall find it;* that *fools shall be afflicted, because of their transgressions;* and that *whoso refuseth instruction shall destroy his own soul.* By listening to these admonitions, and tempering the vivacity of youth with a proper mixture of serious

thought, you may ensure cheerfulness for the rest of life; but by delivering yourselves up at present to giddiness and levity, you lay the foundation of lasting heaviness of heart.

When you look forward to those plans of life, which either your circumstances have suggested, or your friends have proposed, you will not hesitate to acknowledge, that, in order to pursue them with advantage, some previous discipline is requisite. Be assured, that, whatever is to be your profession, no education is more necessary to your success, than the acquirement of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. In the usual course of human affairs, it will be found that a plain understanding, joined with acknowledged worth, contributes more to prosperity, than the brightest parts without probity or honour. Whether science, or business, or public life, be your aim, virtue still enters, for a principal share, into all those great departments of society. It is connected with eminence, in every liberal art; with reputation, in every branch of fair and useful business; with distinction, in every public station. The vigour which it gives the mind, and the weight which it adds to character; the generous sentiments which it breathes, the undaunted spirit which it inspires, the ardour of diligence which it quickens, the freedom which it procures from pernicious and dishonourable avocations, are the foundations of all that is high in fame, or great in success, among men.

Whatever ornamental or engaging endowments you now possess, virtue is a necessary requisite, in

order to their shining with proper lustre. Feeble are the attractions of the fairest form, if it be suspected that nothing within corresponds to the pleasing appearance without. Short are the triumphs of wit, when it is supposed to be the vehicle of malice. By whatever arts you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away.

Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements so essential to your future felicity and honour. Now is the seed-time of life; and according to *what you sow you shall reap*. Your character is now, under Divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is as yet pliant and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices have not pre-occupied your understanding. The world has not had time to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, disembarrassed and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in which your life is to run; nay it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity. As in the succession of the seasons, each, by the invariable laws of Nature, affects the productions of what is next in course; so, in human life, every period of our age, according as

it is well or ill spent, influences the happiness of that which is to follow. Virtuous youth gradually brings forward accomplished and flourishing manhood; and such manhood passes of itself, without uneasiness, into respectable and tranquil old age. But when nature is turned out of its regular course, disorder takes place in the moral, just as in the vegetable world. If the Spring put forth no blossoms, in Summer there will be no beauty, and in Autumn no fruit. So if youth be trifled away without improvement, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been *vanity*, its latter end can be no other than *vexation of spirit.*

Having thus shown the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to conduct, I come, next, to point out the virtues which are most necessary to be cultivated in youth. What I shall,

I. Recommend, is piety to God. With this I begin, both as a foundation of good morals, and as a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in youth. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise into the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found, so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe, and the Author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration, can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every where display? Untouched

by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which, in this pleasing season of life, his beneficent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affection of those with whom you are connected, look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship which has ever been shown you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy, and the guide of your childhood; now, the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him for all his goodness. Consider it as the service of the *God of your Fathers;* of him to whom your parents devoted you; of him, whom in former ages your ancestors honoured; and by whom they are now rewarded, and blessed in Heaven. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictate of the heart.

But though piety chiefly belong to the heart, yet the aid of the understanding is requisite, to give a proper direction to the devout affections. You must endeavour, therefore, to acquire just views, both of the great principles of natural religion, and of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. For this end, study the sacred Scriptures. Consult the word of God, more than the systems of men, if you would know the truth in its native purity. When, upon rational and sober inquiry, you have established your principles, suffer them not to be shaken by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical. Remember, that in the examination of every great and comprehensive plan, such as that of Christianity,

difficulties may be expected to occur; and that reasonable evidence is not to be rejected, because the nature of our present state allows us only to *know in part, and to see through a glass, darkly.*

Impress your minds with reverence for all that is sacred. Let no wantonness of youthful spirits, no compliance with the intemperate mirth of others, ever betray you into prophane sallies. Besides the guilt which is thereby incurred, nothing gives a more odious appearance of petulance and presumption to youth, than the affectation of treating religion with levity. Instead of being an evidence of superiour understanding, it discovers a pert and shallow mind; which, vain of the first smatterings of knowledge, presumes to make light of what the rest of mankind revere.

At the same time you are not to imagine, that when exhorted to be religious, you are called upon to become more formal and solemn in your manners than others of the same years, or to erect yourselves into supercilious reprovers of those around you. The spirit of true religion breathes gentleness and affability. It gives a native, unaffected ease to the behaviour. It is social, kind, and cheerful; far removed from that gloomy and illiberal superstition which clouds the brow, sharpens the temper, dejects the spirit, and teaches men to fit themselves for another world, by neglecting the concerns of this. Let your religion, on the contrary, connect preparation for Heaven, with an honourable discharge of the duties of active life. Let it be associated in your imagination, with all that is manly and useful; *with whatsoever things are true, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report,* wherever there is *any vir-*

tue, and wherever there is *any praise*. Of such religion discover, on every proper occasion, that you are not ashamed; but avoid making any unnecessary ostentation of it before the world.

II. To piety, join modesty and docility, reverence of your parents, and submission to those who are your superiours in knowledge, in station, and in years. Dependence and obedience belong to youth. Modesty is one of its chief ornaments; and has ever been esteemed a presage of rising merit. When entering on the career of life, it is your part, not to assume the reins as yet into your hands; but to commit yourselves to the guidance of the more experienced, and to become wise by the wisdom of those who have gone before you.

Of all the follies incident to youth, there are none which either deform its present appearance, or blast the prospect of its future prosperity, more than self-conceit, presumption and obstinacy. By checking its natural progress in improvement, they fix it in long immaturity; and frequently produce mischiefs, which can never be repaired. Yet these are vices too commonly found among the young. Big with enterprise, and elated by hope, they resolve to trust for success to none but themselves. Full of their own abilities, they deride the admonitions which are given them by their friends, as the timorous suggestions of age. Too wise to learn, too impatient to deliberate, too forward to be restrained, they plunge, with precipitant indiscretion, into the midst of all the dangers with which life abounds. *Seest thou a* young *man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool, than of him.*—Positive as you now are in your

opinions, and confident in your assertions, be assured that the time approaches when both men and things will appear to you in a different light. Many characters which you now admire, will, by and by, sink in your esteem; and many opinions, of which you are at present most tenacious, will alter as you advance in years. Distrust, therefore, that glare of youthful presumption, which dazzles your eyes. Abound not in your own sense. Put not yourselves forward with too much eagerness; nor imagine, that, by the impetuosity of juvenile ardour, you can overturn systems which have been long established, and change the face of the world. *Learn not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think, but to think soberly.* By patient and gradual progression in improvement, you may, in due time, command lasting esteem; but by assuming, at present, a tone of superiority, to which you have no title, you will disgust those whose approbation it is most important to gain. Forward vivacity may fit you to be the companion of an idle hour. More solid qualities must recommend you to the wise, and mark you out for importance and consideration in subsequent life.

III. It is necessary to recommend to you, sincerity and truth. This is the basis of every virtue. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object, unamiable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If, at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to show itself free and open, you can already smile and deceive, what are we to look

for when you shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men; when interest shall have completed the obduration of your heart, and experience shall have improved you in all the arts of guile? Dissimulation in youth, is the fore-runner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance is the fatal omen of growing depravity, and future shame. It degrades parts and learning, obscures the lustre of every accomplishment; and sinks you into contempt with God and man.

As you value, therefore, the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of truth. In all your proceedings, be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candour possess the most powerful charm; they bespeak universal favour, and carry an apology for almost every failing. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.* * The path of truth is a plain and a safe path; that of falsehood is a perplexing maze. After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in your power to stop. One artifice unavoidably leads on to another; till, as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, you are left entangled in your own snare. Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct. It betrays, at the same time, a dastardly spirit. It is the resource of one who wants courage to avow his designs, or to rest upon himself. Whereas, openness of character displays that generous boldness which ought to distinguish youth. To set out in the world with no other principle than a crafty attention to interest, betokens

* Prov. xii. 19.

one who is destined for creeping through the inferior walks of life. But to give an early preference to honour above gain, when they stand in competition; to despise every advantage which cannot be attained without dishonest arts; to brook no meanness; and to stoop to no dissimulation; are the indications of a great mind, the presages of future eminence and distinction in life.

At the same time this virtuous sincerity is perfectly consistent with the most prudent vigilance and caution. It is opposed to cunning, not to true wisdom. It is not the simplicity of a weak and improvident, but the candour of an enlarged and noble mind; of one who scorns deceit, because he accounts it both base and unprofitable; and who seeks no disguise, because he needs none to hide him. *Lord! who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall ascend into thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.*

IV. YOUTH is the proper season of cultivating the benevolent and humane affections. As a great part of your happiness is to depend on the connexions which you form with others, it is of high importance that you acquire, by times, the temper and the manners which will render such connexions comfortable. Let a sense of justice be the foundation of all your social qualities. In your most early intercourse with the world, and even in your youthful amusements, let no unfairness be found. Engrave on your mind that sacred rule, of *doing all things to others, according as you wish that they should do unto you.* For this end, impress yourselves with a deep sense of the

original and natural equality of men. Whatever advantages of birth or fortune you possess, never display them with an ostentatious superiority. Leave the subordinations of rank, to regulate the intercourse of more advanced years. At present, it becomes you to act among your companions, as man with man. Remember how unknown to you are the vicissitudes of the world; and how often they, on whom ignorant and contemptuous young men once looked down with scorn, have risen to be their superiours in future years.

Compassion is an emotion of which you ought never to be ashamed. Graceful in youth is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of woe. Let not ease and indulgence contract your affections, and wrap you up in selfish enjoyment. But go sometimes to the *house of mourning*, as well as *to the house of feasting*. Accustom yourselves to think of the distresses of human life; as the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan. *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt surely give unto him in the day of his need: And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him; because that for this thing, the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works.* * Never sport with pain and distress, in any of your amusements; nor treat even the meanest insect with wanton cruelty.

In young minds, there is commonly a strong propensity to particular intimacies and friendships. Youth, indeed, is the season when friendships are sometimes formed, which not only continue through

* Deut. xv. 7. 10.

succeeding life, but which glow to the last, with a tenderness unknown to the connexions begun in cooler years. The propensity therefore is not to be discouraged; though at the same time it must be regulated with much circumspection and care. Too many of the pretended friendships of youth, are mere combinations in pleasure. They are often founded on capricious likings; suddenly contracted, and as suddenly dissolved. Sometimes they are the effect of interested complaisance and flattery on the one side, and of credulous fondness on the other. Beware of such rash and dangerous connexions, which may afterwards load you with dishonour. Remember, that by the character of those whom you choose for your friends, your own is likely to be formed, and will certainly be judged of by the world. Be slow, therefore, and cautious in contracting intimacy; but when a virtuous friendship is once established, consider it as a sacred engagement. Expose not yourselves to the reproach of lightness and inconstancy, which always bespeak either a trifling, or a base mind. Reveal none of the secrets of your friend. Be faithful to his interests. Forsake him not in danger. Abhor the thought of acquiring any advantage by his prejudice or hurt. *There is a friend that loveth at all times, and a brother that is born for adversity. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.* *

Finally, on this head; in order to render yourselves amiable in society, correct every appearance of harshness in behaviour. Let that courtesy distinguish your demeanour, which springs not so much

* Prov. xvii. 17.—xxvii. 10.

from studied politeness, as from a mild and gentle heart. Follow the customs of the world in matters indifferent, but stop when they become sinful. Let your manners be simple and natural; and of course they will be engaging. Affectation is certain deformity. By forming themselves on fantastic models, and vying with one another in every reigning folly, the young begin with being ridiculous, and end in being vicious and immoral.

V. Let me particularly exhort youth to temperance in pleasure: Let me admonish them, to beware of that rock on which thousands from race to race continue to split. The love of pleasure natural to man in every period of his life, glows at this age with excessive ardour. Novelty adds fresh charms, as yet, to every gratification. The world appears to spread a continual feast; and health, vigour, and high spirits, invite them to partake of it without restraint. In vain we warn them of latent dangers. Religion is accused of insufferable severity, in prohibiting enjoyment; and the old, when they offer their admonitions, are upbraided with having forgot that they once were young.—And yet, my friends, to what do the restraints of religion, and the counsels of age, with respect to pleasure, amount? They may all be comprised in few words, not to hurt yourselves, and not to hurt others, by your pursuit of pleasure. Within these bounds pleasure is lawful; beyond them, it becomes criminal, because it is ruinous. Are these restraints any other than what a wise man would choose to impose on himself? We call you not to renounce pleasure, but to enjoy it in safety. Instead of abridging it, we exhort you

to pursue it on an extensive plan. We propose measures for securing its possession, and for prolonging its duration.

Consult your whole nature. Consider yourselves not only as sensitive, but as rational beings; not only as rational, but social; not only as social, but immortal. Whatever violates your nature in any of these respects, cannot afford true pleasure; any more than that which undermines an essential part of the vital system can promote health. For the truth of this conclusion, we appeal, not merely to the authority of religion, nor to the testimony of the aged, but to yourselves and your own experience. We ask, Whether you have not found, that in a course of criminal excess, your pleasure was more than compensated by succeeding pain? Whether, if not from every particular instance, yet from every habit, at least, of unlawful gratification, there did not spring some thorn to wound you, there did not arise some consequence to make you repent of it in the issue? *How long then ye simple ones! will ye love simplicity?* How long repeat the same round of pernicious folly, and tamely expose yourselves to be caught in the same snare? If you have any consideration, or any firmness left, avoid temptations, for which you have found yourselves unequal, with as much care, as you would shun pestilential infection. Break off all connexions with the loose and profligate. *When sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup: for at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Remove thy way from the strange woman, and come not near the door of her house. Let not thine heart incline to her ways; for her house is the*

way to hell. Thou goest after her as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.

By these unhappy excesses of irregular pleasure in youth, how many amiable dispositions are corrupted or destroyed! How many rising capacities and powers are suppressed! How many flattering hopes of parents and friends are totally extinguished! Who but must drop a tear over human nature, when he beholds that morning which arose so bright, overcast with such untimely darkness; that good humour which once captivated all hearts, that vivacity which sparkled in every company, those abilities which were fitted for adorning the highest station, all sacrificed at the shrine of low sensuality; and one who was formed for running the fair career of life in the midst of public esteem, cut off by his vices at the beginning of his course, or sunk, for the whole of it, into insignificancy and contempt! — These, O sinful pleasure! are thy trophies. It is thus that, co-operating with the foe of God and man, thou degradest human honour, and blastest the opening prospects of human felicity.

VI. Diligence, industry, and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young. To no purpose are they endowed with the best abilities, if they want activity for exerting them. Unavailing in this case, will be every direction that can be given them, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. In youth, the habits of industry are most easily acquired. In youth, the incentives to it are strongest, from ambition and from duty, from emulation and hope, from all the prospects which the beginning of life affords. If, dead to these calls, you already

languish in slothful inaction, what will be able to quicken the more sluggish current of advancing years?

Industry is not only the instrument of improvement, but the foundation of pleasure. Nothing is so opposite to the true enjoyment of life, as the relaxed and feeble state of an indolent mind. He who is a stranger to industry, may possess, but he cannot enjoy. For it is labour only which gives the relish to pleasure. It is the appointed vehicle of every good to man. It is the indispensable condition of our possessing a sound mind in a sound body. Sloth is so inconsistent with both, that it is hard to determine whether it be a greater foe to virtue, or to health and happiness. Inactive as it is in itself, its effects are fatally powerful. Though it appear a slowly flowing stream, yet it undermines all that is stable and flourishing. It not only saps the foundation of every virtue, but pours upon you a deluge of crimes and evils. It is like water, which first putrefies by stagnation, and then sends up noxious vapours, and fills the atmosphere with death.

Fly, therefore, from idleness, as the certain parent both of guilt and of ruin. And under idleness I conclude, not mere inaction only, but all that circle of trifling occupations, in which too many saunter away their youth; perpetually engaged in frivolous society, or public amusements; in the labours of dress, or the ostentation of their persons.—Is this the foundation which you lay for future usefulness and esteem? By such accomplishments do you hope to recommend yourselves to the thinking part of the world, and to answer the expectations of your friends, and your country?—Amusements, youth requires

It were vain, it were cruel to prohibit them. But though allowable as the relaxation, they are most culpable as the business, of the young. For they then become the gulph of time, and the poison of the mind. They foment bad passions. They weaken the manly powers. They sink the native vigour of youth into contemptible effeminacy.

Redeeming your time from such dangerous waste, seek to fill it with employments which you may review with satisfaction. The acquisition of knowledge is one of the most honourable occupations of youth. The desire of it discovers a liberal mind, and is connected with many accomplishments, and many virtues. But though your train of life should not lead you to study, the course of education always furnishes proper employments to a well-disposed mind. Whatever you pursue, be emulous to excel. Generous ambition, and sensibility to praise, are, especially at your age, among the marks of virtue. Think not that any affluence of fortune, or any elevation of rank, exempt you from the duties of application and industry. Industry is the law of our being; it is the demand of Nature, of Reason, and of God. Remember always, that the years which now pass over your heads, leave permanent memorials behind them. From your thoughtless minds they may escape; but they remain in the remembrance of God. They form an important part of the register of your life. They will hereafter bear testimony, either for or against you, at that day, when, for all your actions, but particularly for the employments of youth, you must give an account to God.

THUS I have set before you some of the chief qualifications which belong to that *sober mind*, that virtuous and religious character, which the Apostle in my Text recommends to youth; piety, modesty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry. Whether your future course is destined to be long or short, after this manner it should commence; and, if it continue to be thus conducted, its conclusion, at what time soever it arrives, will not be inglorious or unhappy. For, *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, or that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man, and an unspotted life is old age.*

LET me finish the subject with recalling your attention to that dependence on the blessing of Heaven, which, amidst all your endeavours after improvement, you ought continually to preserve. It is too common with the young, even when they resolve to tread the path of virtue and honour, to set out with presumptuous confidence in themselves. Trusting to their own abilities for carrying them successfully through life, they are careless of applying to God, or of deriving any assistance from what they are apt to reckon the gloomy discipline of religion. Alas! how little do they know the dangers which await them! Neither human wisdom, nor human virtue, unsupported by religion, are equal to the trying situations, which often occur in life. By the shock of temptation, how frequently have the most virtuous intentions been overthrown? Under the pressure of disaster, how often has the greatest constancy sunk? *Every good, and every perfect gift, is from above.* Wisdom and virtue, as well as *riches*

and honour, come from God. Destitute of his favour, you are in no better situation with all your boasted abilities than orphans left to wander in a trackless desert, without any guide to conduct them, or any shelter to cover them from the gathering storm. Correct, then, this ill-founded arrogance. Expect not, that your happiness can be independent of him who made you. By faith and repentance, apply to the Redeemer of the world. By piety and prayer, seek the protection of the God of Heaven. I conclude with the solemn words, in which a great Prince delivered his dying charge to his son; words which every young person ought to consider as addressed to himself, and to engrave deeply on his heart: *Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers; and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.* *

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

SERMON XII.

On the Duties and Consolations of the Aged.

Proverbs, xvi. 31.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

TO *fear God, and to keep his commandments*, is the rule of our duty, in every period of life. But, as the light which guides our steps, varies with the progress of the day, so the rule of religious conduct is diversified in its application by the different stages of our present existence. To every age, there belongs a distinct propriety of behaviour. There arises from it, a series of duties peculiar to itself.

Of those which are incumbent on youth, I have treated in the preceding Discourse. As we advance from youth to middle age, a new field of action opens, and a different character is required. The flow of gay and impetuous spirits begins to subside. Life gradually assumes a graver cast; the mind a more sedate and thoughtful turn. The attention is now transferred from pleasure to interest; that is, to pleasure diffused over a wider extent, and measured by a larger scale. Formerly, the enjoyment of the present moment occupied the whole attention. Now, no action terminates ultimately in itself, but refers to some more distant aim. Wealth and power, the instruments of lasting gratification, are now coveted

more than any single pleasure. Prudence and foresight lay their plans. Industry carries on its patient efforts. Activity pushes forward: address winds around. Here, an enemy is to be overcome; there, a rival to be displaced. Competitions warm; and the strife of the world thickens on every side. To guide men through this busy period, without loss of integrity; to guard them against the temptations which arise from mistaken or interfering interests; to call them from worldly pursuits to serious thoughts of their spiritual concerns, is the great office of religion.

But as this includes, in a great measure, the whole compass of moral duty, as the general strain of religious exhortation is addressed to those who are in this season of life; a delineation of the virtues properly belonging to middle age, may appear unnecessary, and would lead us into too wide a field. Let us therefore turn our view to a bounded prospect; and contemplate a period of life, the duties of which are circumscribed within narrower limits. Old age is a stage of the human course, which every one hopes to reach; and therefore the consideration of it interests us all. It is a period justly entitled to general respect. Even its failings ought to be touched with a gentle hand: and though the petulant, and the vain, may despise the *hoary head;* yet the wisest of men has asserted in the Text, that when *found in the way of righteousness, it is a crown of glory.* I shall first offer some counsels, concerning the errours which are most incident to the aged. Secondly, I shall suggest the peculiar duties they ought to practise; and, thirdly, point out the consolations they may enjoy.

I. As the follies and vices of youth are chiefly derived from inexperience and presumption; so almost all the errours of age may be traced up to the feebleness and distresses peculiar to that time of life. Though in every part of life, vexations occur, yet, in former years, either business, or pleasure, served to obliterate their impression, by supplying occupation to the mind. Old age begins its advances, with disqualifying men, for relishing the one, and for taking an active part in the other. While it withdraws their accustomed supports, it imposes, at the same time, the additional burden of growing infirmities. In the former stages of their journey, hope continued to flatter them with many a fair and enticing prospect. But in proportion as old age increases, those pleasing illusions vanish. Life is contracted within a narrow and barren circle. Year after year steals somewhat away from their store of comfort, deprives them of some of their ancient friends, blunts some of their powers of sensation, or incapacitates them for some function of life.

Though in the plan of Providence, it is wisely ordered, that before we are called away from the world, our attachment to it should be gradually loosened; though it be fit in itself, that, as in the day of human life, there is a morning and a noon, so there should be an evening also, when the lengthening shadows shall admonish us of approaching night; yet we have no reason to be surprised, if they who are arrived at this dejecting season, feel and lament the change which they suffer. The complaints, therefore, of the aged, should meet with tenderness, rather than censure. The burden under which they labour ought to be viewed with sympathy, by those

who must bear it in their turn, and who, perhaps, hereafter may complain of it as bitterly. At the same time, the old should consider, that all the seasons of life have their several trials allotted to them; and that to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience, is as much their duty, as is that of the young to resist the temptations of youthful pleasure. By calmly enduring, for the short time that remains, what Providence is pleased to inflict, they both express a resignation most acceptable to God, and recommend themselves to the esteem and assistance of all who are around them.

But though the querulous temper imputed to old age, is to be considered as a natural infirmity, rather than as a vice; the same apology cannot be made for that peevish disgust at the manners, and that malignant censure of the enjoyments, of the young, which is sometimes found to accompany declining years. Nothing can be more unjust, than to take offence at others, on account of their partaking of pleasures, which it is past your time to enjoy. By indulging this fretful temper, you both aggravate the uneasiness of age, and you alienate those on whose affection much of your comfort depends. In order to make the two extremes of life unite in amicable society, it is greatly to be wished that the young would look forward, and consider that they shall one day be old; and that the old would look back, and, remembering that they once were young, make proper allowances for the temper and the manners of youth.

But, instead of this, it is too common to find the aged at declared enmity with the whole system of present customs and manners; perpetually complaining of the growing depravity of the world, and of

the astonishing vices and follies of the rising generation. All things, according to them, are rushing fast into ruin. Decency and good order have become extinct, ever since that happy discipline, under which they spent their youth has passed away. —— Part, at least, of this displeasure, you may fairly impute to the infirmity of age, which throws its own gloom on every surrounding object. Similar lamentations were, in the days of your youth, poured forth by your fathers; and they who are now young, shall, when it comes to their turn, inveigh, in the like strain, against those who succeed them. Great has been the corruption of the world in every age. Sufficient ground there is for the complaints made by serious observers at all times of abounding iniquity and folly. But though particular modes of vice prevail in one age more than in others, it does not follow, that on that age all iniquity is accumulated. It is the form, perhaps, more than the quantity of corruption, which makes the distinction. In the worst of times, God has assured us, that there shall be always *a seed who shall serve him.* * *Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise.* † Former follies pass away and are forgotten. Those which are present, strike observation, and sharpen censure. Had the depravation of the world continued to increase in proportion to those gloomy calculations, which for so many centuries past, have estimated each race as worse than the preceding; by this time, not one ray of good sense, nor one

* Psalm xxii. 30. † Eccles. vii. 10. 16.

spark of piety and virtue, must have remained unextinguished among mankind.

One of the vices of old age, which appears the most unaccountable, is that covetous attachment to worldly interest, with which it is often charged. But this, too, can naturally be deduced from the sense of its feebleness and decay. In proportion as the vigour both of body and mind declines, timidity may be expected to increase. With anxious and fearful eye, the aged look forward to the evils which threaten them, and to the chances which may befall. Hence, they are sometimes apt to overvalue riches, as the instrument of their defence against these dangers, and as the most certain means of securing them against solitude and disrespect. But though their apprehensions may justify a cautious frugality, they can by no means excuse a sordid avarice. It is no less absurd than it is culpable, in the old, from the dread of uncertain futurity, to deny themselves the enjoyment of the present; and to increase in anxiety about their journey, in proportion as it draws nearer to its close. There are more effectual methods of commanding respect from the world, than the mere possession of wealth. Let them be charitable, and do good. Let them mix beneficence to their friends, with a cheerful enjoyment of the comforts which benefit their state. They will then receive the returns of real respect and love. Whereas, by their riches, they procure no more than pretended demonstrations of regard; while their ill-judged parsimony occasions many secret wishes for their death.

As increasing years debilitate the body, so they weaken the force, and diminish the warmth of the affections. Chilled by the hand of time, the heart

loses that tender sensibility, with which it once entered into the concerns and sorrows of others. It is, in truth, a merciful appointment of Providence, that as they who see many days, must behold many a sad scene, the impressions of grief upon their heart should be blunted by being often repeated; and that, in proportion as their power of advancing the prosperity of others decreases, their participation of the misfortunes of others should also lessen. However, as in every period of life, humanity and friendship contribute to happiness, it is both the duty and the interest of the aged, to cherish the remains of the kind affections; and from the days of former years, to recall such impressions as may tend to soften their hearts. Let them not, from having suffered much in the course of their long pilgrimage, become callous to the sufferings of others. But remembering that they still are men, let them study to keep their heart open to the sense of human woe. Practised in the ways of men, they are apt to be suspicious of design and fraud; for the knowledge and the distrust of mankind too often go together. Let not, however, that wary caution, which is the fruit of their experience, degenerate into craft. Experience ought also to have taught them, that amidst all the falsehood of men, integrity is the best defence; and that he who continueth to the end to to *walk uprightly*, shall continue to *walk surely*. Having thus offered some admonitions concerning the errours most incident to age, I proceed,

II. To point out the duties which peculiarly belong to it.

The first which I shall mention is a timely retreat

from the world. In every part of life, we are in hazard of being too deeply immersed in its cares. But during its vigorous periods, the impulse of active spirit, the necessary business of our station, and the allowable endeavours to advance our fortune by fair industry, render it difficult to observe true moderation. In old age, all the motives of eager pursuit diminish. The voice of nature then calls you to leave to others the bustle and contest of the world; and gradually to disengage yourselves from a burden, which begins to exceed your strength. Having borne your share of the heat and labour of the day, let the evening of life be passed in the cool and quiet shade. It is only in the shade, that the virtues of old age can flourish. There, its duties are discharged with more success; and there, its comforts are enjoyed with greatest satisfaction.

By the retreat of old age, however, I do not mean a total cessation from every worldly employment. There is an errour in this as well as in the opposite extreme. Persons who have been long harassed with business and care, sometimes imagine, that when life declines, they cannot make their retirement from the world too complete. But where they expected a delicious enjoyment of leisure and ease, they have often found a melancholy solitude. Few are able, in any period of their days, to bear a total abstraction from the world. There remains a vacancy which they cannot fill up. Incapable of being always employed in the exercises of religion, and often little qualified for the entertainments of the understanding, they are in hazard of becoming a burden to themselves, and to all with whom they are connected. It is, therefore, the duty of the aged, not so much

to withdraw entirely from worldly business, as to contract its circle; not so much to break off, as to loosen their communication with active life. Continuing that train of occupation to which they have been most accustomed, let them pursue it with less intenseness; relaxing their efforts, as their powers decline; retiring more and more from public observation, to domestic scenes, and serious thoughts; till as the decays of life advance, the world shall of itself withdraw to a greater distance from their view, its objects shall gradually yield their place to others of more importance; and its tumults shall sound in their ears only like a noise which is heard from afar.

If it be the duty of the old, to retreat betimes from the fatigue of worldly care, it is still more incumbent on them to quit the pursuit of such pleasures as are unsuitable to their years. Cheerfulness in old age, is graceful. It is the natural concomitant of virtue. But the cheerfulness of age is widely different from the levity of youth. Many things are allowable in that early period, which, in maturer years, would deserve censure; but which, in old age, become both ridiculous and criminal. By aukwardly affecting to imitate the manners, and to mingle in the vanities of the young, as the aged depart from the dignity, so they forfeit the privileges of grey hairs. But if, by follies of this kind, they are degraded, they are exposed to much deeper blame, by descending to vicious pleasure, and continuing to hover round those sinful gratifications to which they were once addicted. Amusement and relaxation the aged require, and may enjoy. But let them consider well, that by every intemperate indulgence, they accelerate decay;

instead of enlivening they oppress, and precipitate their declining state. Ease, safety, and respect, are the proper enjoyments of age. Within these bounds let it remain, and not vainly attempt to break through that barrier by which nature has separated the pleasures of youth from the comforts left to the concluding years of life.

A material part of the duty of the aged consists in studying to be useful to the race who are to succeed them. Here opens to them an extensive field, in which they may so employ themselves, as considerably to advance the interest of religion, and the happiness of mankind. To them it belongs, to impart to the young the fruit of their long experience, to instruct them in their proper conduct, and to warn them of the various dangers of life; by wise counsel, to temper their precipitate ardour; and, both by precept and example, to form them to piety and virtue.

It is not by rigorous discipline, and unrelaxing austerity, that they can maintain an ascendant over youthful minds. The constraint which their presence will impose, and the aversion which their manners will create, if the one be constantly awful, and the other severe, tend to frustrate the effect of all their wisdom. They must assume the spirit of the companion, and the friend; and mix, with the authority of age, a proper degree of indulgence to the manners of the young. Instead of lessening the respect due to their years by such condescension, they take the surest method to increase it. Old age never appears with greater dignity, than when tempered with mildness, and enlivened with good humour, it acts as the guide and the patron of

youth. Religion, displayed in such a character, strikes the beholders, as at once amiable and venerable. They revere its power, when they see it adding so much grace to the decays of nature, and shedding so pleasing a lustre over the evening of life. The young wish to tread in the same steps, and to arrive at the close of their days with equal honour. They listen with attention to counsels which are mingled with tenderness, and rendered respectable by grey hairs. For notwithstanding all its presumption, youth naturally bends before superiour knowledge and years. Aged wisdom, when joined with acknowledged virtue, exerts an authority over the human mind, greater even than that which arises from power and station. It can check the most forward, abash the most profligate, and strike with awe the most giddy and unthinking.

In the midst of their endeavours to be useful to others, let not the aged forget those religious employments which their own state particularly requires. The first of these is reflection on their past behaviour, with a view to discover the errours which they have committed; and, as far as remaining life allows, to apply themselves to repentance and amendment.—Long has the world bewildered you in its maze, and imposed upon you by its arts. The time is now come, when this great seducer should mislead you no more. From the calm station at which you are arrived, sequestered from the crowd of the deceiving and the deceived, review your conduct with the eye of Christians and immortal beings. After all the tumult of life is over, what now remains to afford you solid satisfaction? Have you served God with fidelity, and discharged your part to your fellow-

creatures with integrity and a good conscience? Can you look forward without terrour to that day which is to dissolve your connection with this world, and to bring you into the presence of him who made you, in order to give account of your actions?—The retrospect of life is seldom wholly unattended by uneasiness and shame. Though to the good and the bad it presents a very different scene: yet, to all men, it recalls much guilt incurred, and much time mis-spent. It too much resembles the review which a traveller takes from some eminence, of a barren country, through which he has passed, where the heath and the desert form the chief prospect; diversified only by a few scattered spots of imperfect cultivation.

Turn then your thoughts to the proper methods of making your peace with God through Jesus Christ, and implore, from Divine grace, that *new heart*, and *right spirit*, which will fit you for a better world. Let devotion fill up many of those hours which are now vacant from worldly business and care. Let your affections dwell among divine and immortal objects. In silent and thoughtful meditation, walk as on the shore of that vast ocean, upon which you are soon to embark. Summon up all the considerations, which should reconcile you to your departure from life; and which may prepare you for going through its last scene with firmness and decency. Often let your thanksgivings ascend to God, for that watchful care with which he has hitherto conducted you, through the long journey of life. Often let your prayers be heard, that in what remains of your pilgrimage, he may not forsake you; and that, when you enter into the *valley of the shadow of death*, he

may there support you with *his staff*, and defend you with *his rod*. — Amidst such thoughts and cares, let old age find you employed, betaking yourselves to a prudent and timely retreat; disengaged both from the oppressive load of business, and from the unseasonable pursuit of pleasure; applying yourselves to form the succeeding race, by your counsels, to virtue and wisdom; reviewing seriously your past life; by repentance and devotion, preparing yourselves for a better; and with humble and manly composure, expecting that hour, which Nature cannot now long delay. It remains,

III. To suggest the consolations which belong to old age, when thus *found in the way of righteousness*.

I must introduce them with observing, That nothing is more reasonable in itself, than to submit patiently to those infirmities of Nature which are brought on by the increase of years. You knew before-hand what you had to expect, when you numbered the successive summers and winters which were passing over your heads. Old age did not attack you by surprise, nor was it forced upon you against your choice. Often, and earnestly, did you wish to *see long life and many-days*. When arrived at the desired period, have you any just cause to complain, on account of enduring what the constitution of our being imposes on all? Did you expect, that for your sake, Providence was to alter its established order? Throughout the whole vegetable, sensible and rational world, whatever makes progress towards maturity, as soon as it has passed that point, begins to verge towards decay. It is as natural for

old age to be frail, as for the stalk to bend under the ripened ear, or for the autumnal leaf to change its hue. To this law all who went before you have submitted; and all who shall come after you must yield. After they have flourished for a season, they shall fade, like you, when the period of decline arrives, and bow under the pressure of years.

During the whole progress of the human course, the principal materials of our comfort or uneasiness lie within ourselves. Every age will prove burdensome to those who have no fund of happiness in their own breast. Preserve them, if you could, from infirmity of frame; bestow upon them, if it were possible, perpetual youth; still they would be restless and miserable, through the influence of ill-governed passions. It is not surprising, that such persons are peevish and querulous when old. Unjustly they impute to their time of life, that misery with which their vices and follies embitter every age. Whereas, to good men, no period of life is unsupportable, because they draw their chief happiness from sources which are independent of age or time. Wisdom, piety, and virtue, grow not old with our bodies. They suffer no decay from length of days. To them only belongs unalterable and unfading youth. *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.* *

You can now, it is true, no longer relish many of those pleasures which once amused you. Your sensations are less quick than formerly; your days more languishing. But if you have quitted the region of

* Psalm xcii. 13, 14.

pleasure, in return you possess that of tranquillity and repose. If you are strangers to the vivacity of enjoyment, you are free, at the same time, from the pain of violent and often disappointed desire. Much fatigue, much vexation, as well as vanity, attend that turbulence of life in which the younger part of mankind are engaged. Amidst those keen pursuits and seeming pleasures, for which you envy them, often they feel their own misery, and look forward with a wishful eye to the season of calmness and retreat. For on all sides of human life, the balance of happiness is adjusted with more equality, than at first appears; and if old age throws some new distresses into the scale, it lightens also the weight of others. Many passions which formerly disturbed your tranquillity, have now subsided. Many competitions which long filled your days with disquiet and strife, are now at an end. Many afflictions which once rent your hearts with violent anguish, are now softened into a tender emotion, on the remembrance of past woe. In the beginnings of life, there was room for much apprehension, concerning what might befall in its progress. Your security was never untroubled. Your hopes were interrupted by many anxieties and fears. Having finished the career of labour and danger, your anxiety ought of course to lessen. Ready to enter into the harbour, you can look back, as from a secure station, upon the perils you have escaped, upon the tempest by which you was tossed, and upon the multitudes who are still engaged in conflicting with the storm.

If you have acted your part with integrity and honour, you are justly entitled to respect, and you

will generally receive it. For rarely, or never, is old age contemned, unless, when, by vice or folly it renders itself contemptible. Though length of time may have worn off superficial ornaments, yet what old age loses in grace, it often gains in dignity. The veneration, as was before observed, which grey hairs command, puts it in the power of the aged to maintain a very important place in human society. They are so far from being insignificant in the world, that families long holden together by their authority, and societies accustomed to be guided by their counsels, have frequently had cause to regret their loss, more than that of the most vigorous and young. To success of every kind, the head which directs, is no less essential than the hand which executes. Vain, nay, often dangerous, were youthful enterprize, if not conducted by aged prudence. *I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach* * *wisdom. Therefore, thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God.* †

Though in old age, the circle of your pleasures is more contracted than it has formerly been; yet within its limits many of those enjoyments remain, which are most grateful to human nature. Temperate mirth is not extinguished by advanced years. The mild pleasures of domestic life still cheer the heart. The entertainments of conversation, and social intercourse, continue unimpaired. The desire of knowledge is not abated by the frailty of the body; and the leisure of old age affords many opportunities for gratifying that desire. The sphere of your observation and reflection is so much enlarged by long acquaintance with the world, as to

* Job, xxii. 7. † Lev. xix. 32.

supply, within itself, a wide range of improving thought. To recall the various revolutions which have occurred since you began to act your part in life; to compare the characters of past and present times; to trace the hand of Providence, in all the incidents of your own lot; to contemplate, with thoughtful eye, the successive new appearances which the world has assumed around you, in government, education, opinions, customs, and modes of living; these are employments, no less entertaining than instructive to the mind.

While you are engaged in such employments, you are, perhaps, surrounded with your families, who treat you with attention and respect; you are honoured by your friends; your character is established; you are placed beyond the reach of clamour, and the *strife of tongues;* and, free from distracting cares, you can attend calmly to your eternal interests. For such comforts as these, have you not cause most thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of Heaven? Do they not afford you ground to pass the remainder of your days in resignation and peace; disposing yourselves to rise in due time, like satisfied guests, from the banquet that has been set before you; and to praise and bless, when you depart, the great Master of the feast? *To a man that is good in his sight,* whether he be young or old, *God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.* For every season of life, the benignity of his providence hath prepared its own satisfactions, while his wisdom hath appointed its peculiar trials. No age is doomed to total infelicity; provided that we attempt not to do violence to Nature, by seeking to extort from one age the pleasures of another; and to gather, in the Winter

of life, those flowers which were destined to blossom only in its Summer, or its Spring.

But perhaps it will be said, That I have considered old age only in its first stages, and in its most favourable point of light; before the faculties are as yet much impaired, and when disease or affliction has laid no additional load on the burden of years. Let us then view it with all its aggravations of distress. Let us suppose it arrived at its utmost verge, worn out with infirmities, and bowed down by sickness and sorrow. Still there remains this consolation, that it is not long ere *the weary shall be at rest.* Having passed through so many of the toils of life, you may now surely, when your pilgrimage touches on its close, bear, without extreme impatience, the hardships of its concluding stage. From the inestimable promises of the Gospel, and from the gracious presence of God, the afflictions of old age cannot seclude you. Though *your heart should begin to faint, and your flesh to fail,* there is One, who can be *the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. Even to your old age, saith the Lord, I am He; and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.* * *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* †

There is undoubtedly a period, when there ought to be a satiety of life, as there is of all other things; and when death shall be viewed as your merciful dismission from a long warfare. *To come to the grave*

* Isa. xlvi. 4. † Jer. xlix. 11.

in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season, * is the natural termination of the human course. Amidst multiplying infirmities, to prolong life beyond its usual bounds, and to draw out your existence here to the last and foulest dregs, ought not to be the wish of any wise man. Is it desirable, to continue lingering on the borders of the grave, after every tie which connects you with life is broken; and to be left a solitary individual, in the midst of a new generation, whose faces you hardly know? The shades of your departed friends rise up before you, and warn you, that it is time to depart. Nature and Providence summon you, to be *gathered to your fathers.* Reason admonishes you, that, as your predecessors made way for you, it is just that you should yield your place to those who have arisen to succeed you on this busy stage; who, for a while, shall fill it with their actions and their sufferings, their virtues and their crimes; and then shall, in their turn, withdraw, and be joined to the forgotten multitudes of former ages.

Could death, indeed, be considered in no other view than as the close of life, it would afford only a melancholy retreat. The total extinction of being is a thought, which human nature, in its most distressed circumstances, cannot bear without dejection. But, blessed be God! far other prospects revive the spirits of the aged, who have spent their life in piety and virtue. To them, death is not the extinction, but the renovation of the living principle; its removal from *the earthly house of this tabernacle, to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

* Job, v. 26.

Having fought the good fight; having finished their course, and kept the faith; there is laid up for them the crown of righteousness. The Saviour of the world hath not only *brought immortality to light*, but placed it within the reach of their hope and trust. By making atonement for their guilt, he hath prepared their way *within the veil;* and secured to them the possession of *an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in the heavens.* — Such are the hopes and prospects which cheer the sorrows of old age, and surmount the fear of death. Faith and piety are the only adequate supports of human nature in all its great emergencies. After they have guided us through the various trials of life, they uphold us, at last, amidst the ruins of this falling frame; and when the *silver cord is just ready to be loosed, and the golden bowl to be broken; when the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern;* they enable us to say, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?*

SERMON XIII.

On the Power of Conscience.

Genesis, xlii. 21, 22.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore behold also his blood is required.

THIS book of Genesis displays a more singular and interesting scene, than was ever presented to the world by any other historical record. It carries us back to the beginning of time, and exhibits mankind in their infant and rising state. It shews us human manners in their primitive simplicity, before the arts of refinement had polished the behaviour, or disguised the characters of men; when they gave vent to their passions without dissimulation, and spoke their sentiments without reserve. Few great societies were, as yet, formed on the earth. Men lived in scattered tribes. The transactions of families made the chief materials of history; and they are related in this book, with that beautiful simplicity, which, in the highest degree, both delights the imagination, and affects the heart.

Of all the patriarchal histories, that of Joseph and his brethren is the most remarkable, for the characters of the actors, the instructive nature of the events, and the surprising revolutions of worldly fortune. As far as relates to the Text, and is necessary for explaining it, the story is to the following purpose: —— Joseph, the youngest, except one, of the sons of Jacob, was distinguished by his father with such marks of peculiar affection, as excited the envy of his brethren. Having related to them, in the openness of his heart, certain dreams which portended his future advancement above them, their jealousy rose to such a height, that they unnaturally conspired his destruction. Seizing the opportunity of his being at a distance from home, they first threw him into a pit, and afterwards sold him for a slave; imposing on their father by a false relation of his death. When they had thus gratified their resentment, they lost all remembrance of their crime. The family of Jacob was rich and powerful; and several years passed away, during which they lived in prosperity; without being touched, as far as appears, with the least remorse for the cruel deed which they had committed.

Meanwhile, Joseph was safely conducted by the hand of Providence, through a variety of dangers, until, from the lowest condition, he rose at last to be chief favourite of the King of Egypt, the most powerful monarch at that time in the world. While he possessed this high dignity, a general famine distressed all the neighbouring countries. In Egypt alone, by means of his foresight and prudent administration, plenty still reigned. Compelled to have recourse to that kingdom for supply of food, the brethren of Joseph, upon this occasion, appeared

in his presence, and made their humble application to him, for liberty to purchase corn; little suspecting the Governour of the land, before whom they *bowed down their faces to the earth*, to be him, whom long ago they had sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites. But Joseph no sooner saw, than he knew his brethren; and, at this unexpected meeting, his heart melted within him. Fraternal tenderness arose in all its warmth, and totally effaced from his generous breast the impression of their ancient cruelty. Though, from that moment, he began to prepare for them a surprize of joy; yet he so far constrained himself as to assume an appearance of great severity. By this he intended, both to oblige them to bring into Egypt his youngest and most beloved brother, whose presence he instantly required; and also, to awaken within them a due sense of the crime which they had formerly perpetrated. Accordingly, his behaviour produced the designed effect. For while they were in this situation, strangers in a foreign land, where they had fallen, as they conceived, into extreme distress; where they were thrown into prison by the Governour, and treated with rigour, for which they could assign no cause; the reflection mentioned in the Text arose in their minds. Conscience brought to remembrance their former sins. It recalled, in particular, their long-forgotten cruelty to Joseph; and without hesitation, they interpreted their present distress to be a judgment, for this crime, inflicted by Heaven. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is*

this distress come upon us. — *Behold also his blood is required.*

From this instructive passage of history, the following observations naturally arise. I. That a sense of right and wrong in conduct, or of moral good and evil, belongs to human nature. II. That it produces an apprehension of merited punishment, when we have committed evil. III. That although this inward sentiment be stifled during the season of prosperity, yet in adversity it will revive. And, IV. That when it revives, it determines us to consider every distress which we suffer, from what cause soever it has arisen, as an actual infliction of punishment by Heaven. The consideration of these particulars will lead us to a very serious view of the nature of man, and of the government of God.

I. There belongs to human nature a sense of moral good and evil, or a faculty which distinguishes right from wrong, in action and conduct. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty.* —— In an age, when the law was not yet given, when no external revelation of the Divine will subsisted, except what had been handed down among the patriarchs from one generation to another; the brethren of Joseph reasoned concerning their conduct upon the same moral principles, and were affected by the same feelings, of which we are conscious at this day. Such sentiments are coëval with human nature; for they are the remains of a law which was originally *written in our heart.* In the darkest regions of the earth, and among the rudest tribes of men, a distinction has ever been

made between just and unjust, between a duty and a crime. Throughout all the intercourse of human beings these distinctions are supposed. They are the foundation of the mutual trust which the transactions of life require; nay, the very entertainments of society constantly appeal to them. The Historian, who studies to magnify his hero, by representing him as just and generous; the Poet, who seeks to interest the world in his fictions, by engaging the heart in behalf of distressed virtue; are sufficient to confute the Sceptic, who denies any natural perception of a distinction in actions.

But though a sense of moral good and evil be deeply impressed on the heart of man, yet it is not of sufficient power to regulate his life. In his present corrupted state, it is both too general to afford him full direction in conduct, and too feeble to withstand the opposition of contrary principles in his nature. It is often perverted by ignorance and superstition; it is too easily overcome by passion and desire. Hence, the importance of that divine revelation, which communicates both light and strength; which, by the instructive discoveries it makes, and by the powerful assistance it supplies, raises man to a station infinitely superiour to that which he possesses under the mere light of Nature.

It is of consequence, however, to remark, That this revelation necessarily supposes an antecedent sense of right and wrong to take place in the human mind. It addresses itself to men, as possessed of such a faculty; and, when it commands them, in general terms, to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any*

virtue, and if there be any praise, it plainly appeals to the native dictates of their heart. Nay, unless men were endowed by nature with some sense of duty or of moral obligation, they could reap no benefit from revelation; they would remain incapable of all religion whatever. For, in vain were a system of duty prescribed to them by the word of God; allegiance were in vain required towards their Creator, or love and gratitude enjoined towards their Redeemer; if, previously, there was no principle in their nature, which made them feel the obligations of duty, of allegiance, and of gratitude. They could have no ideas corresponding to such terms; nor any conviction, that, independently of fear or interest, they were bound to regard, either him who made, or him who redeemed them.—This, therefore, is to be held as a principle fundamental to all religion: That there is in human nature, an approving or condemning sense of conduct; by means of which, *they who have not the law, are a law unto themselves.** They who, from a mistaken zeal for the honour of Divine revelation, either deny the existence, or vilify the authority of natural religion, are not aware, that by disallowing the sense of obligation, they undermine the foundation on which revelation builds its power of commanding the heart.

The Text leads us to observe, That one of the cases in which the natural sense of good and evil operates most forcibly, is when men have been guilty of injustice or inhumanity. *We saw the anguish of our brother's soul, when he besought us; and we*

* Rom. ii. 14.

would not hear. An inward principle prompts us to do good to others, but with much greater authority, it checks and condemns us, when we have done them injuries. This part of the human constitution deserves to be remarked as a signal proof of the wisdom of its Author, and of the gracious provision which he has made for the welfare of mankind. We are all committed, in some measure, to the care and assistance of one another. But our mutual influence reaches much farther with respect to the evils, than with respect to the enjoyments, of those around us. To advance their prosperity, is often beyond our ability; but to inflict injuries, is almost always within our power: And, at the same time, self-interest very frequently tempts us to commit them. With the utmost propriety, therefore, we are so framed, that the influence of the moral principle should be most authoritative, in cases where its aid is most needed; that to promote the happiness of others, should appear to us as praiseworthy, indeed, and generous; but that, to abstain from injuring them, should be felt as matter of the strictest duty. —— Amidst the distress which the Patriarchs suffered in Egypt, had only this suggestion occurred, "We saw our brother beginning to prosper, and we "contributed not to his advancement," their minds would have been more easily quieted. But, when their reflection was, We *saw his anguish, when he besought us, and we would not hear*, then compunction turned upon them its sharpest edge. I proceed to observe,

II. That our natural sense of right and wrong produces an apprehension of merited punishment

when we have committed a crime. When it is employed in surveying the behaviour of others, it distinguishes some actions, as laudable and excellent; and disapproves of others, as evil and base. But when it is directed upon our own conduct, it assumes a higher office, and exercises the authority of a judge. It is then properly termed Conscience; and the sentiments which it awakens, upon the perpetration of a crime, are styled Remorse. *Therefore*, said the brethren of Joseph, *is this distress come upon us, behold also his blood is required.* They acknowledged, not only that they had committed a wrong, but a wrong for which they were justly doomed to suffer.

Did not conscience suggest this natural relation between guilt and punishment, the mere principle of approbation, or disapprobation, with respect to moral conduct, would prove of small efficacy. For disapprobation attends, in some degree, every conviction of impropriety, or folly. When one has acted unsuitably to his interest, or has trespassed against the rules of prudence or decorum, he reflects upon his conduct with pain, and acknowledges that he deserves blame. But the difference between the sense of misconduct, and the sense of guilt, consists in this, that the latter penetrates much deeper into the heart. It makes the criminal feel, that he is not only blameable, but justly punishable, for the part which he has acted. With reference to this office of conscience, the inspired writers frequently speak of it, in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of judicial procedure; as *bearing witness for or against us; accusing or excusing, judging and condemning.* It will be found, that in the language of most nations,

terms of the same import are applied to the operations of conscience; expressing the sense which all mankind have, of its passing sentence upon them, and pronouncing rewards or punishments to be due to their actions.

The sense of punishment merited, you are further to observe, can never be separated from the dread, that, at some time or other, punishment shall be actually inflicted. This dread is not confined to the vengeance of man. For let the sinner's evil deeds be ever so thoroughly concealed from the knowledge of the world, his inward alarms are not quieted by that consideration. Now punishment is the sanction of a law. Every law supposes a rightful superiour: And, therefore, when conscience threatens punishment to secret crimes, it manifestly recognises a supreme Governour, from whom nothing is hidden. The belief of our being accountable to him, is what the most hardened wickedness has never been able to eradicate. It is a belief which arises, not merely from reasoning, but from internal sentiment. Conscience is felt to act as the delegate of an invisible ruler; both anticipating his sentence, and foreboding its execution.

Hence arise the terrours, which so often haunt guilt, and rise in proportion to its atrocity. In the history of all nations, the tyrant and the oppressor, the bloody and the flagitious, have been ever pointed out as fearful, unquiet, and restless; subject to alarms and apprehensions of an unaccountable kind. And surely, to live under such disquietude, from the dread of merited punishment, is already to undergo one of the most severe punishments which human nature can suffer. When the world threatens us with any

of its evils, we know the extent, and discern the limits of the danger. We see the quarter on which we are exposed to its attack. We measure our own strength with that of our adversary; and can take precautions, either for making resistance or for contriving escape. But when an awakened conscience places before the sinner the just vengeance of the Almighty, the prospect is confounding, because the danger is boundless. It is a dark unknown which threatens him. The arm that is stretched over him, he can neither see nor resist. On every side he dreads it; and on every object which surrounds him, he looks with terrour, because he is conscious that every object can be employed against him as an instrument of wrath. No wonder that the lonesome solitude, or the midnight hour, should strike him with horrour. His troubled mind beholds forms, which other men see not; and hears voices, which sound only in the ear of guilt. A hand appears to come forth and to write upon the wall over-against him, as it did of old in the sight of an impious monarch, *He shall find no ease nor rest. For the Lord shall give him a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And his life shall hang in doubt before him; and he shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of his life. In the morning he shall say, Would to God it were even; and at even he shall say, Would to God it were morning, for the fear of his heart wherewith he shall fear, and for the sight which his eyes shall see. His life shall be grievous unto* * *him.* — Adversity! how blunt are all the arrows of thy quiver, in comparison with those of guilt! — But if

* Deut. xxviii. 65, 66, 67. Isa. xv. 4.

such be the power of conscience, whence, it may be asked, comes it to pass, that its influence is not more general, either in restraining men from the commission of sin, or in leading them to a timely repentance? This brings me to observe,

III. That during a course of prosperity, the operations of conscience are often suspended: and that adversity is the season which restores them to their proper force. At the time when crimes are committed, the mind is too much heated by passion, and engrossed by the object of its pursuit, to be capable of proper reflection. After this tumult of spirits has subsided, if a train of new passions be at hand to employ its activity, or a succession of pleasurable objects occur to engage its attention, it may for a while remain, though not entirely free from inward misgivings, yet unconscious of the degree of its guilt. Dissipated among the amusements of life, the sinner escapes, in some measure, from his own view. If he reflects upon himself at all, the continuance of prosperity seems to him a strong justification of his conduct. For it will be found that, in the hearts of all men, there is a natural propensity to judge of the favour of the Supreme Being, from the course of external events. When they are borne with a smooth gale along the stream of life, and behold every thing proceeding according to their wish, hardly can they be brought to believe, that Providence is their enemy. Basking in the sunshine of prosperity, they suppose themselves to enjoy the smile of indulgent Heaven; and fondly conclude, that they are on terms of friendship with all above, and with all below. Easy they find it, then, to spread over the grossest crimes a

covering, thin, indeed, and slight, yet sufficient to conceal them from a superficial view.

Of this we have a very remarkable instance in those brethren of Joseph, whose history we now consider. Not only from the silence of the inspired writer, we have ground to believe that their remorse was stifled, while their prosperity remained; but we are able to trace some of the pretences, by which, during that period, they quieted their minds. For when they were contriving the destruction of Joseph, we find Judah saying to his brethren, *What profit is it, if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites; and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh: and his brethren were content.* * Here you behold them justifying their crime, by a sort of pretended humanity; and making light of selling their brother for a slave, because they did not take away his life. How strangely are the opinions of men altered, by a change in their condition! How different is this sentiment of the Patriarchs, from that which they afterwards entertained of the same action, when, as you see in the Text, the remembrance of it wrung their hearts with anguish.

But men, in truth, differ as much from themselves, in prosperity and in adversity, as if they were different creatures. In prosperity every thing tends to flatter and deceive. In adversity, the illusions of life vanish. Its avocations, and its pleasures, no longer afford the sinner that shelter he was wont to find from conscience. Formerly he made a part of the crowd. He now feels himself a solitary indi-

* Gen. xxxvii. 26, 27.

vidual, left alone with God, and with his own mind. His spirits are not supported, as before, by fallacious views of the favour of Heaven. The *candle of the Lord* shines not on his head; his pride is humbled; and his affections are softened for receiving every serious impression. In this situation, a man's *iniquity is sure to find him out.* Whatever has been notoriously criminal in his former conduct, rises as a spectre, and places itself before him. The increased sensibility of his mind renders him alive to feelings which lately were faint; and wounds which had been ill healed bleed afresh. When *men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they say, What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* But when *they are holden in the cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work, and their transgression, that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ears to discipline; and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*

Hence, we may perceive the great usefulness and propriety of that interchange of conditions, which takes place in human life. By prosperity, God gives scope to our passions, and makes trial of our dispositions. By adversity, he revives the serious principle within. Neither the one, nor the other, could be borne entire and unmixed. Man, always prosperous, would be giddy and insolent; always afflicted, would be sullen and despondent. Hopes and fears, joy and sorrow, are therefore so blended in his life, as both to give room for worldly pursuits, and to recall, from time to time, the admonitions of conscience. Of the proportion in which they should be mixed for this purpose, we are very incompetent judges. From our ignorance of the degree of dis-

cipline which the spiritual state of others requires, we often censure Providence unjustly, for its severity towards them: And, from the vanity and rashness of our wishes, we complain, without reason, of its rigour to ourselves. While we consult nothing but our ease, God attends to our spiritual improvement. When we seek what is pleasing, he sends what is useful. When, by drinking too deep of worldly prosperity, we draw in a secret poison, he mercifully infuses a medicine, at the time that he troubles and embitters the waters. It remains now to observe,

IV. That when conscience is thoroughly awakened, it determines the sinner to consider every calamity which he suffers as a positive infliction of punishment by Heaven. As it had before alarmed him with threatenings of Divine displeasure, it tells him when he falls under distress, that the threatened day of account is come. Afflictions, on some occasions, rise directly out of our sins. Thus diseases are brought on by intemperance; poverty springs from idleness; and disgrace from presumption. In such cases, the punishment is so closely connected with the crime, that it is impossible to avoid discerning the relation which the one bears to the other. But the appointment of Providence, which we now consider, reaches farther than this. God has framed us so, that distresses, which have no perceivable connection with our former crimes, are nevertheless interpreted by conscience, to be inflicted on their account. They force themselves upon our apprehension under this view. They are made to carry, not only that degree of pain which properly belongs

to themselves, but that additional torment also, which arises from the belief of their being the vengeance of the Almighty.

Let a man fall unexpectedly into some deep calamity. Let that calamity be brought upon him, either by means which the world calls fortuitous; or by a train of incidents, in which his own misconduct or guilt has apparently had no part; yet one of the first questions, which, in such a situation, he puts to himself, is, What have I done to deserve this? His reflection is, almost instinctively, drawn back upon his former life; and if, in the course of that retrospect, any flagrant guilty deed occur to smite his conscience, on this he cannot avoid resting with anxiety and terrour, and connecting it in his imagination with what he now suffers. He sees, or thinks that he sees, a Divine arm lifted up; and what, in other circumstances, he would have called a reverse of fortune, he now views as a judgment of Heaven.

When the brethren of Joseph, confined in the Egyptian prison, were bewailing the distress into which they had fallen, there was no circumstance which pointed out any relation between their present misfortune, and their former cruelty to their brother. A long course of years had intervened, during which they flourished in wealth and ease. They were now far from the scene of their crime; in a foreign land where they believed themselves utterly unknown, and where they had done nothing to offend. But conscience formed a connection between events, which, according to the ordinary apprehension of men, were entirely independent of each other. It made them recollect, that they, who once had

been deaf to the supplications of a brother, were now left friendless and forlorn, imploring pity in vain from an unrelenting Governour; and that they who had first conspired to kill their brother, and afterwards sold him for a slave, were themselves deprived of liberty, and threatened with an ignominious death. How undeservedly soever these evils befel them on the part of men, they confessed them to be just on the part of Providence. They concluded the hour of retribution to be arrived; and in the person of the Governour of Egypt, they beheld the Ruler of the world calling them to account for guilt. *Therefore is this distress come upon us. Behold also his blood is required.*

Similar sentiments on like occasions will be found not uncommon among mankind. Pious men, there is no doubt, are at all times disposed to look up to God, and to acknowledge his hand in every event of life. But what I now observe is, That where no habitual acknowledgment of God takes place; nay, where a daring contempt of his authority has prevailed, conscience, nevertheless, constrains men, in the day of their distress, to recognise God, under the most awful of all characters, The avenger of past guilt.

Herein the wisdom of God appears in such a light, as justly to claim our highest admiration. The ordinary course of his Providence is carried on by human means. He has settled a train of events, which proceed in a regular succession of causes and effects, without his appearing to interpose, or to act. But these, on proper occasions, are made to affect the human mind in the same manner as if he were beheld descending from his throne, to punish the sin-

ner with his own hand. Were God to suspend the laws of Nature, on occasion of every great crime that was committed on earth, and to govern the world by frequent interpositions of a miraculous kind, the whole order of human affairs would be unhinged; no plans of action could be formed; and no scope would be given for the probation and trial of men. On the other hand, were the operation of second causes allowed to conceal a Divine hand totally from view, all sense of superiour government would be lost; the world would seem to be void of God; the sinner would perceive nothing but chance and fortune in the distresses which he suffered. Whereas, by its being so ordered, that several incidents of life shall carry the same force, and strike the mind with the same impression, as if they were supernatural interpositions, the fear of God is kept alive among men, and the order of human affairs is, at the same time, preserved unbroken. The sinner sees his distress to be the immediate effect of human violence or oppression; and is obliged, at the same moment, to consider it as a divine judgment. His conscience gives to an ordinary misfortune all the edge and the sting of a visitation from Heaven.

From the train of thought which the Text has suggested, several inferences naturally follow. But I shall confine myself to two, which claim your particular attention.

The first is the clear evidence which the preceding observations afford, of a Divine government now exercised over mankind. This most important and awful of all truths, cannot be too often presented to our view, or too strongly impressed on our mind.

To the imperfect conviction of it, which obtains in the world, must be ascribed, in a great measure, the prevalence of sin. Did men firmly believe that the Almighty Being, who formed them, is carrying on a system of administration which will not leave guilt unpunished, it is impossible that they could remain so inattentive, as we often behold them, to their moral conduct. But the bulk of mankind are giddy and thoughtless. Struck by the superficial appearances of pleasure, which accompany licentiousness, they inquire no farther; and deliver themselves up to their senses and their passions. Whereas, were they to reflect, but for a moment, upon that view which has now been given of human nature, they might soon be satisfied, that the moral government of God is no matter of doubtful discussion. It is a fact, no less obvious and incontestible, than the government exercised by those earthly rulers whom we behold with the ensigns of their office before our eyes.

To govern, is to require a certain course of action, or to prescribe a law; and to enforce that law, by a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments. Now, God has not only invested conscience, as we have seen, with authority to promulgate, but endowed it also with power to enforce his law. By placing inward approbation and peace on the side of virtue, he gave it the sanction of reward. But this was not enough. Pain is a more powerful principle than pleasure. To escape misery, is a stronger motive for action, than to obtain good. God, therefore, so framed human nature, that the painful sense of ill-desert should attend the commission of crimes; that this sense of ill-desert should necessarily produce

the dread of punishment; and that this dread should so operate on the mind, in the time of distress, as to make the sinner conceive Providence to be engaged against him, and to be concerned in inflicting the punishment which he suffers. All these impressions he hath stamped upon the heart with his own hand. He hath made them constituent parts of our frame; on purpose that, by the union of so many strong and pungent sentiments, he might enforce repentance and reformation, and publish to the human race his detestation of sin. Were he to speak to us from the clouds, his voice could not be more decisive. What we discern to be interwoven with the contexture of human nature, and to pervade the whole course of human affairs, carries an evidence not to be resisted. We might, with as much reason, doubt whether the sun was intended to enlighten the earth, or the rain to fertilize it; as whether he who has framed the human mind, intended to announce righteousness to mankind, as his law.

The second inference which I make from the foregoing discourse, respects the intimate connexion, which those operations of conscience have, with the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel of Christ. They will be found to accord with them so remarkably, as to furnish an answer to some of those objections, which superficial reasoners are apt to raise against the Christian revelation. In particular, they coincide with that awful view which the Gospel gives us, of the future consequences of guilt. If the sinner is now constrained by conscience, to view the Almighty as pursuing him with evil for long-forgotten crimes, how naturally must he con-

clude, that, in a subsequent period of existence, the Divine administration will proceed upon the same plan, and complete what has been left imperfect here? If, during this life, which is only the time of trial, the displeasure of Providence at sin is displayed by tokens so manifest, what may be apprehended to follow, when justice, which at present only begins to be executed, shall be carried to its consummation? What conscience forebodes revelation verifies; assuring us that a day is appointed when *God will render to every man according to his works; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.* *

While the threatenings of conscience thus strengthen the evidence of the scripture-doctrine concerning future punishments, they likewise pave the way for the belief of what is revealed concerning the method of our deliverance by Christ. They suggest to the sinner, some deep and dark malignity contained in guilt, which has drawn upon his head such high displeasure from Heaven. They call forth his most anxious efforts, to avert the effects of that displeasure; and to propitiate his offended Judge. Some atonement, he is conscious, must be made; and the

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voice of nature has, in every age, loudly demanded suffering, as the proper atonement for guilt. Hence, mankind, have constantly fled for refuge to such substitutions as they could devise, to place in the room of the offender; and as by general consent, victims have every where been slain, and expiatory sacrifices have been offered up on innumerable altars. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or, shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?* * These perplexities and agitations of a guilty conscience, may be termed preludes, in some measure, to the Gospel of Christ. They are the pointings of unenlightened nature, towards that method of relief, which the grace of God has provided. Nature felt its inability to extricate itself from the consequences of guilt: The Gospel reveals the plan of Divine interposition and aid. Nature confessed some atonement to be necessary: The Gospel discovers, that the necessary atonement is made. The remedy is no sooner presented, than its suitableness to the disease appears; and the great mystery of redemption, though it reaches, in its full extent, beyond our comprehension, yet, as far as it is revealed, holds a visible congruity with the sentiments of conscience and of Nature.

Natural and revealed religion proceed from the same Author; and of course, are analogous and consistent. They are part of the same plan of Pro-

* Micah, vi. 6, 7.

vidence. They are connected measures of the same system of government. The serious belief of the one, is the best preparation for the reception of the other. Both concur in impressing our mind with a deep sense of one most important truth, which is the result of this whole discourse, That as we *sow now we must reap;* that under the government of God, no one shall be permitted, with impunity, to gratify his criminal passions, and to make light of the great duties of life.

SERMON XIV.

On the Mixture of Joy and Fear in Religion.

Psalm ii. 11.

Rejoice with trembling.

JOY and Fear are two great springs of human action. The mixed condition of this world gives scope for both; and, according as the one or the other predominates, it influences the general tenour of our conduct. Each of them possesses a proper place in religion. To *serve the Lord with gladness*, is the exhortation of the psalmist David.* To *serve him with reverence and godly fear*, is the admonition of the apostle Paul.† But under the present imperfection of human nature, each of these principles may be carried to a dangerous extreme. When the whole of religion is placed in joy, it is in hazard of rising into unwarrantable rapture. When it rests altogether on fear, it degenerates into superstitious servility. The text enjoins a due mixture of both; and inculcates this important maxim, That joy tempered with fear, is the proper disposition of a good man. In discoursing of this subject, I shall endeavour to shew, first, That joy is essential to religion; and next, That, for various reasons, this joy ought

* Psalm c. 2. † Heb. xii. 28.

to be mixed with fear; whence we shall be able to ascertain the nature of that steady and composed spirit, which is most suitable to our present condition and most acceptable to God.

I. Joy is essential to religion, in two respects; as religion inspires joy, and as it requires it. In other words: To rejoice is both the privilege and the duty of good men.

In the first place, Religion inspires joy. It affords just ground of gladness to all who firmly believe its doctrines, and sincerely study to obey its laws. For it confers on them the two most material requisites of joy; a favourable situation of things without, and a proper disposition of mind within, to relish that favourable situation.

When they examine their situation without, they behold themselves placed in a world which is full of the influence of a gracious Providence; where beauty and good are every where predominant; where various comforts are bestowed; and where, if any be withheld, they have reason to believe that they are withheld by parental wisdom. Among the crowd that encompass them, they may be at a loss to discern who are their friends, and who their enemies. But it is sufficient to know, that they are under the protection of an invisible Guardian, whose power can keep them from every evil. All the steps of his conduct, they may be unable to trace. Events may befal them, of which they can give no account. But as long as they are satisfied that the system of Divine government is founded on mercy, no present occurrences are able to destroy their peace. *For he who*

spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them, how shall he not with him freely give them all things? If their nature is frail, Divine assistance is promised to strengthen it. If their virtue is imperfect, a dispensation is opened which gives them the hope of pardon. If their external circumstances be in any respect unfavourable, it is because a higher interest is consulted. *All things*, they are assured, *shall work together for their good.* On their prosperity rests the blessing; on their adversity the sanctifying Spirit of the Almighty. Old age may advance and life decay; but beyond those boundaries of nature, faith opens the prospect of their lasting felicity. Without anxiety they pass through the different periods of their present existence, because they know it to be no more than an introduction to immortality.

As such a situation of things without, lays a solid foundation for joy; so the disposition which religion forms within, promotes the relish of it. It is indeed from within that the chief sources of enjoyment or trouble rise. The minds of bad men are always disorderly; and hence their lives are so generally uneasy. In vain *they take the timbrel and the harp, and* endeavour to *rejoice at the sound of the organ.* Spleen and disgust pursue them through all the haunts of amusement. Pride and ill-humour torment them. Oppressed with discontent, their spirits flag; and their worn-out pleasures afford them entertainment no more. But religion subdues those malignant passions, which are the troubles of human repose; which either overcast the mind with the gloom of peevishness, or disquiet it by the violence of agitation. It infuses, in their room, those mild and

gentle dispositions whose natural effect is to smooth the tenour of the soul. Benevolence and candour, moderation and temperance, wherever they reign, produce cheerfulness and serenity. The consciousness of integrity gives ease and freedom to the mind. It enables good men to extract from every object, the whole satisfaction which it is capable of yielding; and adds the flavour of innocence, to all their external pleasures.

In the second place, As religion naturally inspires joy; so what it inspires it commands us to cherish. As a necessary proof of our sincerity, it requires cheerfulness in the performance of our duty; because, if this be wanting, our religion discovers itself not to be genuine in principle, and in practice it cannot be stable.

Religious obedience, destitute of joy, is not genuine in its principle. For, did either faith or hope, the love of God or the love of goodness, rule the heart, they could not fail to produce satisfaction in piety and virtue. All those causes of joy which I have mentioned would then operate; and their native effect on the mind, would follow. The prospects which religion opens, would gladden, and the affections which it inspires would soothe the heart. We serve with pleasure the benefactor whom we love. We rejoice in every study and pursuit to which we are sincerely attached. If we serve not God with pleasure, it is because we know him not, or love him not. If we rejoice not in virtue, it is because our affection is alienated from it, and our inclinations are depraved. We give too evident proof, that either we believe not the principles of religion, or

that we feel not their power, Exclude joy from religion, and you leave no other motives to it, except compulsion and interest. But are these suitable grounds on which to rest the whole of our obedience to the Supreme Being? *My son, give me thy heart*, is the call of God. Surely if there be no pleasure in fulfilling his commands, the heart is not given him; and, in that case, *the multitude of sacrifices and burnt offerings* is brought to his altar in vain.

As religion, destitute of joy, is imperfect in its principle, so, in practice it must be unstable. In vain you endeavour to fix any man to the regular performance of that in which he finds no pleasure. Bind him ever so fast by interest or fear, he will contrive some method of eluding the obligation. Ingenuity is never so fertile of evasions as where pleasure is all on the one side, and mere precept on the other. He may study to save appearances. He may dissemble and constrain himself. But his heart revolts in secret; and the weight of inclination will, in the end, draw the practice after it. If perseverance is not to be expected, still less can zeal be looked for from him, who, in his religious duties, trembles without rejoicing. Every attempt towards virtue which he forms, will be feeble and awkward. He applies to it as a task; he dreads the task-master; but he will labour no more than necessity enjoins. To escape from punishment is his sole aim. He bargains for immunity, by every duty which he performs; and all beyond, he esteems superfluous toil. —Such religion as this, can neither purify the heart nor prepare for heavenly bliss. It is the refuge of an abject mind. It may form the ritual of the monk, or prescribe the penance of the idolater; but has no

concern with the homage of him who *worships the Father in spirit and in truth.* His character is, that the *joy of the Lord is his strength.* * It attaches his heart to religion. It inspires his zeal. It supports his constancy; and accelerates his progress.

There is no man but has some object to which he cleaves for enjoyment; somewhat that flatters him with distant hope, or affords him present pleasure. Joy is the end towards which all rational beings tend. For the sake of it they live: It resembles the air they breathe, which is necessary for the motion of the heart, and all the vital functions. But as the breathing of infected air proves fatal to life; in the same manner joy, drawn from a corrupted source, is destructive both of virtue and of true happiness. When you have no pleasure in goodness, you may with certainty conclude the reason to be, that your pleasure is all derived from an opposite quarter. You have exhausted your affection upon the world. You have drunk too much of its poisoned waters to have any relish for a pure spring.

Estimate therefore the genuineness of your religious principles; estimate the degree of your stability in religious practice, by the degree of your satisfaction in piety and virtue. Be assured, that where your treasure is, there will your delight be also. The wordly man rejoices in his possessions; the voluptuous in his pleasures; the social in his friends and companions. The truly good man rejoices in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord his God.* He is happy, when employed in the regular discharge of the great duties of life.

* Neh. viii. 10.

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When they examine their situation without, they behold themselves placed in a world which is full of the influence of a gracious Providence; where beauty and good are every where predominant; where various comforts are bestowed; and where, if any be withheld, they have reason to believe that they are withheld by parental wisdom. Among the crowd that encompass them, they may be at a loss to discern who are their friends, and who their enemies. But it is sufficient to know, that they are under the protection of an invisible Guardian, whose power can keep them from every evil. All the steps of his conduct, they may be unable to trace. Events may befal them, of which they can give no account. But as long as they are satisfied that the system of Divine government is founded on mercy, no present occurrences are able to destroy their peace. *For he who*

our principles, and to confirm us in good practice. At the same time the joy which it inspires, is tempered with fear by the genius of religion itself; by the danger to which unguarded joy would expose us; and by the impropriety of indulging it, in a situation so mixed as the present. The *trembling* which is here enjoined, is not to be understood as signifying a pusillanimous dejection. It imports no more than that caution and sobriety, which prudence dictates, as belonging to our state. By connecting such trembling with our joy, religion means to recommend to us a cheerful, but a composed spirit, equally remote from the humiliating depression of fear, and the exulting levity of joy. Always to rejoice, is to be a fool. Always to tremble, is to be a slave. It is a modest cheerfulness, a chastened joy, a manly seriousness, which becomes the servant of God.

But is this, it may perhaps be said, the whole amount of that boasted satisfaction which religion bestows? Is this all the compensation which it makes, for those sacrifices it exacts? Are not the terms which vice holds out far more enticing, when it permits us to gratify every desire; and, in return for our surmounting the timorous scruples of conscience, promises us a life of gaiety, festivity, and unrestrained joy? —— Such promises vice may indeed make; but how far it fulfils them, we may safely refer to the determination of the greatest sensualist, when he has finished his career, and looks back on what he has enjoyed. Ask him, Whether he would recommend to his children and his friends, to hold the same course; and whether, with his dying breath, he dare assure them, that the gratifications of licentiousness

afford the greatest enjoyment of life? Whatever hopes vice may at the beginning inspire, yet, after the trial is made, it has been always found that criminal pleasures are the bane of happiness, the poison, not the cordial, of our present state. They are pleasures compensated by an infinite overbalance of pain; moments of delight, succeeded by years of regret; purchased at the expence of injured reputation, broken health, and ruined peace. Even abstracting from their pernicious consequences, they are, for most part, in themselves treacherous pleasures; unsound and disturbed in the moments of enjoyment. *In the midst of such laughter, the heart is sorrowful.* Often is the smile of gaiety assumed while the heart akes within: And though folly may laugh, guilt will sting. Correcting this pernicious phrenzy of pleasure, and reducing it to a more sober and regulated state, religion is, in truth, no other than wisdom, introducing peace and order into the life of man.

While religion condemns such pleasures as are immoral, it is chargeable with no improper austerity in respect to those which are of an innocent kind. Think not, that by the cautious discipline which it prescribes, it excludes you from all gay enjoyment of life, within the compass of that sedate spirit, to which it forms you, all that is innocently pleasing wlll be found to lie. It is a mistake to imagine, that in constant effusions of giddy mirth, or in that flutter of spirits which is excited by a round of diversions, the chief enjoyment of our state consists. Were this the case, the vain and the frivolous would be on better terms for happiness, than the wise, the great, and the good. To arrange the plans of amusement, or to preside in the haunts of jollity, would be

more desirable, than to exert the highest effort of mental powers for the benefit of nations. A consequence so absurd, is sufficient to explode the principle from which it flows. To the amusements and lesser joys of the world, religion assigns their proper place. It admits of them, as relaxations from care, as instruments of promoting the union of men, and of enlivening their social intercourse. But though as long as they are kept within due bounds, it does not censure nor condemn them; neither does it propose them as rewards to the virtuous, or as the principal objects of their pursuit. To such it points out nobler ends of action. Their felicity it engages them to seek in the discharge of an useful, an upright, and honourable part in life; and, as the habitual tenour of their mind, it promotes cheerfulness, and discourages levity.

Between these two there is a wide distinction; and the mind which is most open to levity, is frequently a stranger to cheerfulness. It has been remarked, that transports of intemperate mirth are often no more than flashes from the dark cloud; and that in proportion to the violence of the effulgence is the succeeding gloom. Levity may be the forced production of folly or vice; cheerfulness is the natural offspring of wisdom and virtue only. The one is an occasional agitation; the other a permanent habit. The one degrades the character; the other is perfectly consistent with the dignity of reason, and the steady and manly spirit of religion. To aim at a constant succession of high and vivid sensations of pleasure, is an idea of happiness altogether chimerical. Calm and temperate enjoyment is the utmost that is allotted to man. Beyond this, we struggle in

vain to raise our state; and, in fact, depress our joys by endeavouring to heighten them. Instead of those fallacious hopes of perpetual festivity, with which the world would allure us, religion confers upon us a cheerful tranquillity. Instead of dazzling us with meteors of joy which sparkle and expire, it sheds around us a calm and steady light. By mixing *trembling* with our joy, it renders that joy more solid, more equal, and more lasting.

In this spirit, then, let us serve God, and hold our course through life. Let us approach to the Divine Being, as to a sovereign of whom we stand in awe, and to a father in whom we trust. In our conduct, let us be cautious and humble, as those who have ground to fear, well pleased and cheerful, as those who have cause to rejoice. Let us show the world that a religious temper is a temper sedate, not sad; that a religious behaviour, is a behaviour regulated, not stiff and formal. Thus we shall *use the world as not abusing it;* we shall pass through its various changes, with the least discomposure; and we shall vindicate religion from the reproaches of those who would attribute to it either enthusiastic joys, or slavish terrours. We shall shew that it is a rational rule of life, worthy of the perfection of God, and suited to the nature and state of man.

SERMON XV.

On the Motives to Constancy in Virtue.

Galat. vi. 9.

And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

DISCONTENT is the most general of all the evils which trouble the life of man. It is a disease which every where finds materials to feed itself; for, if real distresses be wanting, it substitutes such as are imaginary in their place. It converts even the good things of the world, when they have been long enjoyed, into occasions of disgust. In the midst of prosperity, it disposes us to complain; and renders tranquillity tiresome, only because it is uniform. There is no wonder that this spirit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which corrupts every terrestrial enjoyment, should have sometimes penetrated into the region of virtue. Good men are not without their frailties; and the perverseness incident to human nature too readily leads us, who become weary of all other things, to *be weary*, also, *in well-doing*.

Let me put a case, which perhaps will be found not unfrequent in ordinary life. Suppose a person, after much commerce with the world, to be convinced of its vanity. He has seen its most flattering hopes to be fallacious. He has felt its most boasted plea-

sures to be unsatisfactory. He resolves, therefore, to place his happiness in virtue; and, disregarding all temptations from interest, to adhere to what is right and honourable in conduct. He cultivates acquaintance with religion. He performs, with seriousness, the offices of devotion. He lays down to himself, a rational and useful plan of life; and, with satisfaction, holds on for a while in this reformed course. But, by degrees, discouragements arise. The peace which he hoped to enjoy, is interrupted, either by his own frailties, or by the vices of others. Passions, which had not been thoroughly subdued, struggle for their accustomed gratification. The pleasure which he expected to find in devotion, sometimes fails him; and the injustice of the world often sours and frets him. Friends prove ungrateful; enemies misrepresent, rivals supplant him: And part, at least, of the mortifications which he suffers, he begins to ascribe to virtue. —— Is this all the reward of my serving God, and renouncing the pleasures of sin? *Verily, in vain I have cleansed my heart and washed my hands in innocency. Behold, the ungodly prosper in the world, and have more than heart can wish; while all the day long, I am plagued and chastened every morning.* — To such persons as these, and to all who are in hazard of being infected with their spirit, I now address myself. In reply to their complaints, I purpose to show, That in no state they can choose on earth, by no plan of conduct they can form, it is possible for them to escape uneasiness and disappointment; that in a life of virtue, they will suffer less uneasiness, and fewer disappointments, than in a course of vice; they will possess much higher resources and advantages; and they will be

assured of complete reward at the end. From these considerations, I hope to make it appear, that there is no sufficient reason for our being *weary in well-doing*; and that, taking human life upon the whole, Virtue is far the most eligible portion of man.

I. UNEASINESS and disappointment are inseparable, in some degree, from every state on earth. Were it in the power of the world, to render those who attach themselves to it, satisfied and happy, you might then, I admit, have some title to complain if you found yourselves placed upon worse terms in the service of God. But this is so far from being the case, that among the multitude who devote themselves to earthly pleasure, you will not find a single person who has completely attained his aim. Inquire into the condition of the high and the low, of the gay and the serious, of the men of business and the men of pleasure, and you shall behold them all occupied in supplying some want, or in removing some distress. No man is pleased with being precisely what he is. Every-where there is a void; generally, even in the most prosperous life, there is some corner possessed by sorrow. He who is engaged in business pines for leisure. He who enjoys leisure, languishes for want of employment. In a single state, we envy the comforts of a family. In conjugal life, we are chagrined with domestic cares. In a safe station, we regret the want of objects for enterprise. In an enterprising life, we lament the want of safety. It is the doom of man that his sky should never be free from all clouds. He is, at present, in an exiled and fallen state. The objects which surround him, are beneath his native dignity. God has tinged them all with

vanity, on purpose to make him feel, that this is not his rest; that here he is not in his proper place, nor arrived at his true home.

If, therefore, you aim at a condition which shall be exempted from every disquiet, you pursue a phantom; you increase the vanity and vexation of life, by engaging in a chace so fruitless. If you complain of virtue, because there is incident to it a portion of that uneasiness which is found in every other state, your complaint is most unreasonable. You claim an immunity from evil, which belongs not to the lot of man. Reconcile yourselves, then, to your condition; and, instead of looking for perfect happiness any where on earth, gladly embrace that state which contains the fewest sorrows.

II. Though no condition of human life is free from uneasiness, I contend, That the uneasiness belonging to a sinful course, is far greater than what attends a course of well-doing. If you be weary of the labours of virtue, be assured, that the world, whenever you try the exchange, will lay upon you a much heavier load. It is the outside only of a licentious life, which is gay and smiling. Within, it conceals toil and trouble, and deadly sorrow. For vice poisons human happiness in the spring, by introducing disorder into the heart. Those passions which it seems to indulge, it only feeds with imperfect gratifications; and thereby strengthens them for preying, in the end, on their unhappy victims.

It is a great mistake to imagine that the pain of self-denial is confined to virtue. He who follows the world as much as he who follows Christ, must *take up his cross*; and to him, assuredly, it will prove

a more oppressive burden. Vice allows all our passions to range uncontrolled; and where each claims to be superiour, it is impossible to gratify all. The predominant desire can only be indulged at the expence of its rival. No mortifications which virtue exacts, are more severe than those which ambition imposes upon the love of ease, pride upon interest, and covetousness upon vanity. Self-denial, therefore, belongs, in common, to vice and virtue; but with this remarkable difference, that the passions which virtue requires us to mortify, it tends to weaken; whereas those which vice obliges us to deny, it, at the same time, strengthens. The one diminishes the pain of self-denial, by moderating the demand of passion; the other increases it, by rendering those demands imperious and violent. What distresses, that occur in the calm life of virtue, can be compared to those tortures which remorse of conscience inflicts on the wicked; to those severe humiliations, arising from guilt combined with misfortunes, which sink them to the dust; to those violent agitations of shame and disappointment, which sometimes drive them to the most fatal extremities, and make them abhor their existence? How often, in the midst of those disastrous situations, into which their crimes have brought them, have they cursed the seductions of vice; and with bitter regret, looked back to the day on which they first forsook the path of innocence?

But, perhaps, you imagine, that to such miseries as these, great criminals only are exposed; and that, by a wary and cautious management, it is possible to avoid them. Take vice and virtue, then, in the most general point of view. Compare God and the

world as two masters, the one or other of whom you must obey; and consider fairly in whose service there will be reason for your being weary soonest, and repenting most frequently. The world is both a hard and a capricious master. To submit to a long servitude, in the view of a recompence from which they are excluded in the end, is known to be often the fate of those who are devoted to the world. They sacrifice their present ease to their future prospects. They court the great and flatter the multitude. They prostitute their conscience, and dishonour their character: And, after all their efforts, how uncertain is their success? Competitors justle, and outstrip them. The more artful deceive, the more violent overthrow, them. Fair prospects once smiled: but clouds soon gather; the sky is darkened; the scene changes; and that fickle world, which a moment before had flattered, the next moment forgets them.

God is never mistaken in the character of his servants; for *he seeth their hearts, and judgeth according to the truth.* But the world is often deceived in those who court its favour; and, of course, is unjust in the distribution of its rewards. Flattery gains the ear of power. Fraud supplants innocence; and the pretending and assuming occupy the place of the worthy and the modest. In vain you claim any merit with the world, on account of your good intentions. The world knows them not; regards them not. It judges of you solely by your actions; and what is worse, by the success of your actions, which often depends not on yourselves. But in the sight of the Supreme Being, good intentions supply the place of good deeds, which you had not the oppor-

tunity of performing. The well-meant endeavours of the poor find the same acceptance with him as the generous actions of the rich. The *widow's mite* is, in his eye, a costly offering, and even he *who giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water*, when he can give him no more, *goeth not without his reward.*

As the world is unjust in its judgments, so it is ungrateful in its requitals. Time speedily effaces the memory of the greatest services; and when we can repeat them no more, we are neglected and thrown aside. It was the saying of a noted great man of the world, on the fall of his fortunes, "Had "I served God as faithfully as I have done my King, "he would not have forsaken me in my old age." Unfaithfulness and ingratitude are unknown to God. With him no new favourites arise, to usurp the place, or to bear off the rewards of his ancient servants. *Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoary hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you, saith the Lord Almighty.* * —— Since, then, in our several departments, we must labour, What comparison is there between labouring for God, and for the world? How unjust are they who become weary so much sooner in the service of God, than they do in that of the most severe and imperious of all masters.

III. The resources of virtue are much greater than those of the world; the compensations which it makes for our distresses, far more valuable. Perpetual success belongs neither to the one nor the other. But under disappointments, when they occur, virtue bears us up; the world allows us to sink.

* Isaiah, xlvi. 4.

When the mind of a good man is hurt by misfortunes, religion administers the cordial and infuses the balm. Whereas the world inflicts wounds, and then leaves them to fester. It brings sorrows, but it provides no consolation. Consolation is entirely the province of religion. Supposing religion to be inferior to vice in external advantages, it must be allowed to possess internal peace in a much higher degree. This is so certain, that almost all men, at some period or other of their life, look forward to it, as to a desirable retreat. When the ends of their present pursuit shall be accomplished, they propose to themselves much satisfaction in an honourable discharge of the duties of their station, amidst those moderate passions and temperate pleasures, which innocence allows. That which all men agree in holding to be second in importance to the pursuit which they follow, may be safely esteemed to be the first in real worth; and it may be concluded that, if they were not blinded by some prevailing passion, they would discern and adopt it as such.

It is the peculiar effect of virtue, to make a man's chief happiness arise from himself and his own conduct. A bad man is wholly the creature of the world. He hangs upon its favour, lives by its smiles, and is happy or miserable, in proportion to its success. But to a virtuous man, success in worldly undertakings is but a secondary object. To discharge his own part with integrity and honour is his chief aim. If he has done properly what was incumbent on him to do, his mind is at rest; to Providence he leaves the event. *His witness is in Heaven, and his record is on high.* Satisfied with the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience, he

enjoys himself, and despises the triumphs of guilt. In proportion as such manly principles rule your heart, you will become independent of the world; and will forbear complaining of its discouragements. It is the imperfection of your virtue, which occasions you to *be weary in well-doing*. It is because your hearts remain divided between God and the world, that you are so often discontented; partly wishing to discharge your duty, and partly seeking your happiness from somewhat that is repugnant to your duty. Study to be more consistent in principle, and more uniform in practice, and your peace will be more unbroken.

Though virtue may appear, at first sight, to contract the bounds of enjoyment, you will find, upon reflection, that, in truth, it enlarges them. If it restrains the excess of some pleasures, it favours and increases others. It precludes you from none, but such as are either fantastic and imaginary, or pernicious and destructive. Whatever is truly valuable in human enjoyment, it allows to a good man, no less than to others. It not only allows him such pleasures, but heightens them, by that grateful relish which a good conscience gives to every pleasure. It not only heightens them, but adds to them, also, the peculiar satisfactions which flow from virtuous sentiments, from devout affections, and religious hopes. On how much worse terms is the sinner placed, in the midst of his boasted gratifications? His portion is confined to this world. His good things are all of one sort only; he has neither knowledge nor relish, of any thing beyond them. His enjoyment, therefore, rests on a much narrower basis, than that of the servants of God. Enlarge,

as much as you please, the circle of worldly gratifications; yet, if nothing of the mind and the heart, nothing of a refined and moral nature, enter into that circle, and vary the enjoyment, languor and weariness soon succeed. Among whom do you hear more peevish expressions of discontent, or more frequent complaints of low spirits, than among the professed votaries of worldly pleasure?

Vice and virtue, in their progress, as in every other respect, hold an opposite course. The beginnings of vice are enticing. The first steps of worldly advancement are flattering and pleasing. But the continuance of success blunts enjoyment, and flattens desire. Whereas the beginnings of virtue are laborious. But, by perseverance, its labours diminish, and its pleasures increase. As it ripens into confirmed habit, it becomes both smoother in practice, and more complete in its reward. In a worldly life, the termination of our hopes always meets our view. We see a boundary before us, beyond which we cannot reach. But the prospects of virtue are growing and endless. *The righteous shall hold on in his way; and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* This brings me to consider,

IV. The assured hope which good men enjoy, of a full reward at last. I have endeavoured by several considerations, to correct your impatience under the present discouragements of virtue. I have shown many high advantages, which it already possesses. But now, laying all these aside; supposing virtue to have brought you no advantage, but to have only en-

gaged you in perpetual struggles with an evil world; the Text suggests what is sufficient to answer every objection, and to silence every complaint: *In due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* It is not a loose encouragement, or a dubious hope, which is held forth to us. A direct and explicit declaration is made by the Spirit of God, that piety and virtue, how discouraged soever, or oppressed they may be for a while, shall not be frustrated of their reward; but that *in due season*, when the period which is fixed by the Divine decree shall come, all who have not been *weary in well-doing*, though they may *have sown in tears, shall reap in joy.* As this great principle of faith is so essential to our present argument, and is indeed the foundation of all religion, it will be proper that we now take a view of the grounds on which it rests. By fixing our attention both on the proofs which reason suggests, and on the discoveries which revelation has made, of a state of future retribution, we shall take an effectual method of confirming our adherence to religion, and of baffling those temptations which might lead us to *be weary in well-doing.*

The first, and most obvious presumption, which reason affords in behalf of future rewards to the righteous, arises from the imperfect distribution of good and evil in our present state. Notwithstanding what I have advanced concerning the pleasures and advantages of virtue, it cannot be denied, that the happiness of good men is often left incomplete. The vicious possess advantages, to which they have no right; while the conscientious suffer for the sake of virtue, and groan under distresses which

they have not merited from the world. Indeed, were the distribution of good and evil, in this life, altogether promiscuous; could it be said with truth, that the moral condition of men had no influence whatever upon their happiness or misery; I admit, that from such a state of things, no presumption would arise of any future retribution being intended. They who delight to aggravate the miseries of life, and the distresses of virtue, do no service to the argument in behalf of Providence. For, if total disorder be found to prevail now, suspicions may, too justly, arise, of its prevailing for ever. If he who rules the universe, entirely neglects virtue here, the probability must be small of his rewarding it hereafter. But this is far from being the true state of the fact. What human life presents to the view of an impartial observer, is by no means a scene of entire confusion; but a state of order, begun and carried on a certain length. Virtue is so far from being neglected by the Governour of the world, that from many evident marks it appears to be a chief object of his care. In the constitution of human nature, a foundation is laid, for comfort to the righteous, and for internal punishment to the wicked. Throughout the course of divine government, tendencies towards the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, constantly appear. They are so conspicuous, as not to have escaped the notice of the rudest nations. Over the whole earth they have diffused the belief, that Providence is propitious to virtue, and averse to guilt. Yet these tendencies are, sometimes, disappointed of their effect, and that which Providence visibly favours, is left, at present, without an adequate reward.

From such an imperfect distribution of happiness, what are we to conclude, but that this system is the beginning, not the whole of things; the opening only of a more extensive plan, whose consummation reaches into a future world? If God has already *set his throne for judgment;* if he has visibly begun to reward and to punish, in some degree, on earth, he cannot mean to leave the exercise of government incomplete. Having laid the foundation of a great and noble structure, he will in due time rear it up to perfection. The unfinished parts of the fabric evidently show, that a future building is intended. All his other works are constructed according to the most full and exact proportion. In the natural world, nothing is deficient, nothing redundant. It is in the moral world only that we discover irregularity and defect. It falls short of that order and perfection which appear in the rest of the creation. It exhibits not, in its present state, the same features of complete wisdom, justice, or goodness. But can we believe, that, under the government of the Supreme Being, those apparent disorders shall not be rectified at the last? Or, that from his conduct towards his rational creatures, the chief of his works, the sole objection against his perfection shall be allowed to rise, and shall continue unremoved for ever?

On the supposition of future rewards and punishments, a satisfying account can be given, of all the disorders which at present take place on earth. Christianity explains their origin, and traces them to their issue. Man, fallen from his primæval felicity, is now undergoing probation and discipline for his final state. Divine justice remains, for a season, concealed; and allows men to act their parts with

freedom on this theatre, that their characters may be formed and ascertained. Amidst discouragements and afflictions, the righteous give proof of their fidelity, and acquire the habits of virtue. But if you suppose the events of this life to have no reference to another, the whole state of man becomes not only inexplicable, but contradictory and inconsistent. The powers of the inferior animals are perfectly suited to their station. They know nothing higher than their present condition. In gratifying their appetites, they fulfil their destiny, and pass away. Man, alone, comes forth to act a part, which carries no meaning, and tends to no end. Endowed with capacities, which extend far beyond his present sphere; fitted by his rational nature for running the race of immortality, he is stopped short in the very entrance of his course. He squanders his activity on pursuits, which he discerns to be vain. He languishes for knowledge, which is placed beyond his reach. He thirsts after a happiness, which he is doomed never to enjoy. He sees and laments the disasters of his state; and yet, upon this supposition, can find nothing to remedy them. —Has the eternal God any pleasure in sporting himself with such a scene of misery and folly, as this life, if it had no connection with another, must exhibit to his eye? Did he call into existence this magnificent universe, adorn it with so much beauty and splendour, and surround it with those glorious luminaries which we behold in the heavens, only that some generations of mortal men might arise to behold these wonders, and then disappear for ever? How unsuitable in this case, were the habitation to the wretched inhabitant! How inconsistent the

commencement of his being, and the mighty preparation of his powers and faculties, with his despicable end! How contradictory, in fine, were every thing which concerns the state of man, to the wisdom and perfection of his Maker!

Throughout all ages, and among all nations, the persuasion of a future life has prevailed. It sprung not from the refinements of science, or the speculations of philosophy; but from a deeper and stronger root, the natural sentiments of the human heart. Hence it is common to the philosopher and the savage; and is found in the most barbarous, as well as in the most civilised regions. Even the belief of the being of a God, is not more general on the earth than the belief of immortality. Dark, indeed, and confused, were the notions which men entertained concerning a future state. Yet still, in that state, they looked for retribution, both to the good and the bad; and in the perfection of such pleasures as they knew best and valued most highly, they placed the rewards of the virtuous. So universal a consent seems plainly to indicate an original determination given to the soul by its Creator. It shows this great truth to be native and congenial to man.

When we look into our own breasts, we find various anticipations and presages of future existence. Most of our great and high passions extend beyond the limits of this life. The ambitious and the self-denied, the great, the good, and the wicked, all take interest in what is to happen after they shall have left the earth. That passion for fame, which inspires so much of the activity of mankind, plainly is animated by the persuasion, that consciousness is

to survive the dissolution of the body. The virtuous are supported by the hope, the guilty tormented with the dread, of what is to take place after death. As death approaches, the hopes of the one, and the fears of the other, are found to redouble. The soul, when issuing hence, seems more clearly to discern its future abode. All the operations of conscience proceed upon the belief of immortality. The whole moral conduct of men refers to it. All legislators have supposed it. All religions are built upon it. It is so essential to the order of society, that, were it erased, human laws would prove ineffectual restraints from evil, and a deluge of crimes and miseries would overflow the earth. To suppose this universal and powerful belief to be without foundation in truth, is to suppose, that a principle of delusion was interwoven with the nature of man; is to suppose, that his Creator was reduced to the necessity of impressing his heart with a falsehood, in order to make him answer the purposes of his being.

But though these arguments be strong, yet all arguments are liable to objection. Perhaps this general belief, of which I have spoken, has been owing to inclination and desire, more than to evidence. Perhaps, in our reasonings on this subject from the divine perfections, we flatter ourselves with being of more consequence, than we truly are, in the system of the universe. Hence, the great importance of a discovery proceeding from God himself, which gives full authority to all that reason had suggested, and places this capital truth beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust.

The method which Christianity has taken to convey to us the evidence of a future state, highly deserves our attention. Had the Gospel been addressed, like a system of philosophy, solely to the understanding of men; had it aimed only at enlightening the studious and reflecting, it would have confined itself to abstract truth; it would have simply informed us, that the righteous are hereafter to be rewarded, and sinners to be punished. Such a declaration as that contained in the Text, would have been sufficient: *Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* But the Gospel has not stopped, at barely announcing life and immortality to mankind. It was calculated for popular edification. It was intended to be the religion not merely of the few, whose understanding was to be informed; but of the many, also, whose imagination was to be impressed, and whose passions were to be awakened, in order to give the truth its due influence over them. Upon this account it not only reveals the certainty of a future state, but, in the person of the great Founder of our religion, exhibits a series of acts relating to it; by means of which, our senses, our imaginations, and passions, all become interested in this great object.

The resurrection of Christ from the grave was designed to be a sensible evidence, that death infers not a final extinction of the living principle. He rose, in order to show, that, in our name, he had conquered death, and was *become the first-fruits of them that sleep.* Nor did he only rise from the grave, but, by ascending to heaven in a visible form, before many witnesses, gave an ocular specimen of the transition from this world into the region of the

blessed. The employments which now occupy him there, are fully declared. *As our forerunner he hath entered within the veil. He appears in the presence of God for us. He maketh perpetual intercession for his people. I go*, saith he, *to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.* The circumstances of his coming again, are distinctly foretold. The sounding of the last trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, the appearance of the Judge, and the solemnity with which he shall discriminate the good from the bad, are all described. The very words in which he shall pronounce the final sentence, are recited in our hearing: *Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Then shall the holy and the just be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* They shall enter with him into the *city of the living God.* They shall possess the *new earth and new heavens, wherein dwelleth righteousness. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness for ever.*—By recording such a train of striking circumstances and facts, the Gospel familiarizes us in some measure with a future state. By accommodating this great discovery, in so useful a manner, to the conceptions of men, it furnishes a strong intrinsic evidence of its divine origin.

THUS, upon the whole, whether you consult your reason, or listen to the discoveries of revelation, you behold our argument confirmed; you behold a life

of piety and virtue issuing in immortal felicity. Of what worldly pursuit can it be pronounced, that its reward is certain? Look every where around you, and you shall see, that *the race is* far from being *always to the swift, or the battle to the strong*. The most diligent, the most wise, the most accomplished, may, after all their labours, be disappointed in the end; and be left to suffer the regret of having *spent their strength for nought*. But for the righteous is *laid up the crown of life*. Their final happiness is prepared in the eternal plan of Providence, and secured by the labours and sufferings of the Saviour of the world.

Cease, then, from your unjust complaints against virtue and religion. Leave discontent and peevishness to worldly men. In no period of distress, in no moment of disappointment, allow yourselves to suspect that piety and integrity are fruitless. In every state of being, they lead to happiness. If you enjoy not at present their full rewards, it is because the season of recompence is not yet come. For, *in due season you shall reap*. There is a time which is proper for reward, and there is a period which belongs to trial. How long the one should last, and when the other should arrive, belongs not to you to determine. It is fixed by the wise, though unknown decree of the Almighty. But be assured, that *He that cometh shall come, and will not tarry*. He shall come *in due season*, to restore perfect order among his works; to bring rest to the weary, comfort to the afflicted, and just retribution to all men. *Behold*, saith the faithful and true Witness, *I come quickly, and my reward is with me. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the*

every office which is committed to you: your affection for your friends; your forgiveness of enemies; your charity to the distressed; your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show *your conversation to be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.* It is thus you make *your light to shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* It is thus you are rendered *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.* —But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations distract you; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the lesser.

Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence of God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns it its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connection and arrangement of duties are lost. If virtue appear at all, it will only be in fits

SERMON XVI.

On the Importance of Order in Conduct.

1 Corinth. xiv. 40.

Let all things be done — in order.

RELIGION, like every regular and well-conducted system, is composed of a variety of parts; each of which possesses its separate importance, and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Some graces are essential to it; such as faith and repentance, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; which, for that reason, must be often inculcated on men. There are other dispositions and habits which, though they hold not so high a rank, yet are necessary to the introduction and support of the former; and therefore, in religious exhortations, these also justly claim a place. Of this nature is that regard to order, method, and regularity, which the apostle enjoins us in the text to carry through the whole of life. Whether you consider it as, in itself, a moral duty, or not, yet I hope soon to convince you that it is essential to the proper discharge of almost all duties; and merits, upon that account, a greater degree of attention than is commonly paid to it in a religious view.

If you look abroad into the world, you may be satisfied at the first glance, that a vicious and libertine life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer, that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it coincides with vice, so the pre-

servation of it must assist virtue. By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises a presumption, that it is connected also with spiritual improvement. When you behold a man's affairs, through negligence and misconduct, involved in disorder, you naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You may at the same time justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare, operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. The apostle teaches us in this chapter, that *God is not the author of confusion.* * He is a lover of order; and all his works are full of order. But, *where confusion is, there is,* its close attendant, *every evil work.* † In the sequel of this discourse, I shall point out some of those parts of conduct wherein it is most material to virtue that order take place; and then shall conclude with showing the high advantages which attend it. Allow me to recommend to you, order in the conduct of your affairs; order in the distribution of your time; order in the management of your fortune; order in the regulation of your amusements; order in the arrangement of your society. Thus *let all things be done in order.*

I. MAINTAIN order in the conduct of your worldly affairs. Every man, in every station of life, has some concerns, private, domestic, or public, which require successive attention; he is placed in some sphere of active duty. Let the employments which belong to that sphere be so arranged, that each may keep its place without jostling another; and that which regards the world may not interfere with what

* Ver. 33. † James, iii. 16.

is due to God. In proportion to the multiplicity of affairs, the observance of order becomes more indispensable. But scarcely is there any train of life so simple and uniform, but what will suffer through the neglect of it. I speak not now of suffering in point of worldly interests. I call upon you to attend to higher interests; to remember that the orderly conduct of your temporal affairs, forms a great part of your duty as Christians.

Many, indeed, can hardly be persuaded of this truth. A strong propensity has, in every age, appeared among men, to sequestrate religion from the commerce of the world. Seasons of retreat and devotion they are willing to appropriate to God. But the world they consider as their own province. They carry on a sort of separate interest there. Nay, by the respect which, on particular occasions, they pay to religion, they too often imagine that they have acquired the liberty of acting in worldly matters, according to what plan they choose. How entirely do such persons mistake the design of Christianity! — In this world you are placed by Providence as on a great field of trial. By the necessities of your nature, you are called forth to different employments. By many ties you are connected with human society. From superiours and inferiours, from neighbours and equals, from friends and enemies, demands arise, and obligations circulate through all the ranks of life. This active scene was contrived by the wisdom of Heaven, on purpose that it might bring into exercise all the virtues of the Christian character; your justice, candour, and veracity, in dealing with one another; your fidelity to every trust, and your conscientious discharge of

every office which is committed to you: your affection for your friends; your forgiveness of enemies; your charity to the distressed; your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show *your conversation to be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.* It is thus you make *your light to shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.* It is thus you are rendered *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.* —But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations distract you; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the lesser.

Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence of God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns it its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connection and arrangement of duties are lost. If virtue appear at all, it will only be in fits

and starts. The authority of conscience may occasionally operate, when our situation affords it room for exertion. But in other circumstances of equal importance, every moral sentiment will be overpowered by the tumultuous bustle of worldly affairs. Fretfulness of temper, too, will generally characterise those who are negligent of order. The hurry in which they live, and the embarrassments with which they are surrounded, keep their spirits in perpetual ferment. Conflicting with difficulties which they are unable to overcome, conscious of their own misconduct, but ashamed to confess it, they are engaged in many a secret struggle; and the uneasiness which they suffer within, recoils in bad humour on all who are around them. Hence the wretched resources to which, at last, they are obliged to fly, in order to quiet their cares. In despair of being able to unravel what they have suffered to become so perplexed, they sometimes sink into supine indolence, sometimes throw themselves into the arms of intemperance and loose pleasure; by either of which they aggravate their guilt, and accelerate their ruin. To the end that order may be maintained in your affairs, it is necessary,

II. That you attend to order in the distribution of your time. Time you ought to consider as a sacred trust committed to you by God, of which you are now the depositaries, and are to render account at the last. That portion of it which he has allotted you, is intended partly for the concerns of this world, partly for those of the next. Let each of these occupy, in the distribution of your time, that space which properly belongs to it. Let not the hours of

hospitality and pleasure interfere with the discharge of your necessary affairs; and let not what you call necessary affairs encroach upon the time which is due to devotion. *To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.* * If you delay till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, you overcharge the morrow with a burden which belongs not to it. You load the wheels of time, and prevent it from carrying you along smoothly. He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out that plan, carries on a thread which will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life. The orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his affairs. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidents, all things lie huddled together in one chaos, which admits neither of distribution nor review.

The first requisite for introducing order into the management of time, is to be impressed with a just sense of its value. Consider well how much depends upon it, and how fast it flies away. The bulk of men are in nothing more capricious and inconsistent than in their appretiation of time. When they think of it as the measure of their continuance on earth, they highly prize it, and with the greatest anxiety seek to lengthen it out. But when they view it in separate parcels, they appear to hold it in contempt, and squander it with inconsiderate profusion. While they complain that life is short, they are often wishing its different periods at an end. Covetous of

* Eccles. iii. 1.

every other possession, of time only they are prodigal. They allow every idle man to be master of this property, and make every frivolous occupation welcome that can help them to consume it. Among those who are so careless of time, it is not to be expected that order should be observed in its distribution. But, by this fatal neglect, how many materials of severe and lasting regret are they laying up in store for themselves! The time which they suffer to pass away in the midst of confusion, bitter repentance seeks afterwards in vain to recall. What was omitted to be done at its proper moment, arises to be the torment of some future season. Manhood is disgraced by the consequences of neglected youth. Old age, oppressed by cares that belonged to a former period, labours under a burden not its own. At the close of life, the dying man beholds with anguish that his days are finishing, when his preparation for eternity is hardly commenced. Such are the effects of a disorderly waste of time, through not attending to its value. Every thing in the life of such persons is misplaced. Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due season.

But he who is orderly in the distribution of his time, takes the proper method of escaping those manifold evils. He is justly said to *redeem the time*. By proper management he prolongs it. He lives much in little space; more in a few years than others do in many. He can live to God and his own soul, and at the same time attend to all the lawful interests of the present world. He looks back on the past, and provides for the future. He catches and arrests the hours as they fly. They are marked down for useful purposes, and their memory remains. Whereas

those hours fleet by the man of confusion like a shadow. His days and years are either blanks of which he has no remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular succession of unfinished transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet he can give no account of the business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with justice be pronounced, that *he walketh in a vain show; he is disquieted in vain.*

III. Introduce order into the management of your fortune. Whatever it be, let the administration of it proceed with method and œconomy. From time to time examine your situation; and proportion your expence to your growing or diminishing revenue. Provide what is necessary before you indulge in what is superfluous. Study to do justice to all with whom you deal, before you affect the praise of liberality. In a word, fix such a plan of living as you find that your circumstances will fairly admit, and adhere to it invariably against every temptation to improper excess.

No admonition respecting morals is more necessary than this, to the age in which we live; an age manifestly distinguished by a propensity to thoughtless profusion; wherein all the different ranks of men are observed to press with forward vanity on those who are above them; to vie with their superiours in every mode of luxury and ostentation; and to seek no farther argument for justifying extravagance, than the fashion of the times, and the supposed necessity of living like others around them. This turn of mind begets contempt for sober and orderly plans of life. It overthrows all regard to

domestic concerns and duties. It pushes men on to hazardous and visionary schemes of gain; and unfortunately unites the two extremes of grasping with rapaciousness, and of squandering with profusion. In the midst of such disorder, no prosperity can be of long continuance. While confusion grows upon men's affairs, and prodigality at the same time wastes their substance, poverty makes its advances *like an armed man*. They tremble at the view of the approaching evil; but have lost the force of mind to make provision against it. Accustomed to move in a round of society and pleasures disproportioned to their condition, they are unable to break through the enchantments of habit; and with their eyes open sink into the gulph which is before them. Poverty enforces dependence; and dependence increases corruption. Necessity first betrays them into mean compliances; next, impels them to open crimes; and, beginning with ostentation and extravagance, they end in infamy and guilt. Such are the consequences of neglecting order in our worldly circumstances. Such is the circle in which the profuse and the dissolute daily run. —— To what cause, so much as to the want of order, can we attribute those scenes of distress which so frequently excite our pity; families that once were flourishing reduced to ruin; and the melancholy widow and neglected orphan thrown forth, friendless, upon the world? What cause has been more fruitful in engendering those atrocious crimes which fill society with disquiet and terrour; in training the gamester to fraud, the robber to violence, and even the assassin to blood?

Be assured, then, that order, frugality, and oeconomy are the necessary supports of every personal

and private virtue. How humble soever these qualities may appear to some, they are, nevertheless, the basis on which liberty, independence, and true honour, must rise. He who has the steadiness to arrange his affairs with method and regularity, and to conduct his train of life agreeably to his circumstances, can be master of himself in every situation into which he may be thrown. He is under no necessity to flatter or to lie, to stoop to what is mean, or to commit what is criminal. But he who wants that firmness of mind which the observance of order requires, is held in bondage to the world; he can neither act his part with courage as a man, nor with fidelity as a Christian. From the moment you have allowed yourselves to pass the line of œconomy, and live beyond your fortune, you have entered on the path of danger. Precipices surround you on all sides. Every step which you take may lead to mischiefs, that, as yet, lie hidden; and to crimes that will end in your everlasting perdition.

IV. Observe order in your amusements; that is, allow them no more than their proper place; study to keep them within due bounds; mingle them in a temperate succession with serious duties, and the higher business of life. Human life cannot proceed to advantage without some measure of relaxation and entertainment. We require relief from care. We are not formed for a perpetual stretch of serious thought. By too intense and continued application, our feeble powers would soon be worn out. At the same time, from our propensity to ease and pleasure, amusement proves, among all ranks of men, the most dangerous foe to order; for it tends incessantly to usurp and

encroach, to widen its territories, to thrust itself into the place of more important concerns, and thereby to disturb and counteract the natural course of things. One frivolous amusement indulged out of season, will often carry perplexity and confusion through a long succession of affairs.

Amusements, therefore, though they be of an innocent kind, require steady government, to keep them within a due and limited province. But such as are of an irregular and vicious nature, are not to be governed, but to be banished from every orderly society. As soon as a man seeks his happiness from the gaming-table, the midnight revel, and the other haunts of licentiousness, confusion seizes upon him as its own. There will no longer be order in his family, nor order in his affairs, nor order in his time. The most important concerns of life are abandoned. Even the order of nature is by such persons inverted; night is changed into day, and day into night. Character, honour, and interest itself, are trampled under foot. You may with certainty prognosticate the ruin of these men to be just at hand. Disorder, arisen to its height, has nearly accomplished its work. The spots of death are upon them. Let every one who would escape the pestilential contagion, fly with haste from their company.

V. Preserve order in the arrangement of your society; that is, entangle not yourselves in a perpetual and promiscuous crowd; select with prudence and propriety those with whom you choose to associate; let company and retreat succeed each other at measured intervals. There can be no order in his life, who allots not a due share of his time to retire-

ment and reflection. He can neither prudently arrange his temporal affairs, nor properly attend to his spirital interests. He lives not to himself, but to the world. By continual dissipation, he is rendered giddy and thoughtless. He unavoidably contracts from the world, that spirit of disorder and confusion which is so prevalent in it.

It is not a sufficient preservative against this evil, that the circles of society in which you are engaged are not of a libertine and vicious kind. If they withdraw you from that attention to yourselves, and your domestic concerns, which becomes a good man, they are subversive of order, and inconsistent with duty. What is innocent in itself, degenerates into guilt from being carried to excess; an idle, trifling society is near akin to such as is corrupting: One of the first principles of order is, to learn to be happy at home. It is in domestic retreat that every wise and virtuous man finds his chief satisfaction. It is there he forms the plans which regulate his public conduct. He who knows not how to enjoy himself when alone, can never be long happy abroad. To his vacant mind, company may afford a temporary relief; but when forced to return to himself, he will be so much more oppressed and languid. Whereas, by a due mixture of public and private life, we keep free from the snares of both, and enjoy each to greater advantage.

When we review those different parts of behaviour to which I have shown that order is essential, it must necessarily occur to you, that they are all mutually connected, and hang upon each other. Throughout your affairs, your time, your expence, your amuse-

ments, your society, the principle of order must be equally carried, if you expect to reap any of its happy fruits. For if into any one of those great departments of life you suffer disorder to enter, it will spread through all the rest. In vain, for instance, you purpose to be orderly in the conduct of your affairs, if you be irregular in the distribution of your time. In vain you attempt to regulate your expence, if into your amusements, or your society, disorder has crept. You have admitted a principle of confusion which will defeat all your plans; and perplex and entangle what you sought to arrange. Uniformity is above all things necessary to order. If you desire that any thing should proceed according to method and rule, let *all things*, as the text exhorts, *be done in order*.

I must also admonish you, that in small as well as in great affairs, a due regard to order is requisite. I mean not that you ought to look on those minute attentions which are apt to occupy frivolous minds, as connected either with virtue or wisdom. But I exhort you to remember, that disorder, like other immoralities, frequently takes rise from inconsiderable beginnings. They who, in the lesser transactions of life, are totally negligent of rule, will be in hazard of extending that negligence, by degrees, to such affairs and duties as will render them criminal. Remissness grows on all who study not to guard against it; and it is only by frequent exercise that the habits of order and punctuality can be thoroughly confirmed.

From what has been said, the great importance of this principle to moral and religious conduct must

already be evident. Let us, however, conclude with taking a summary view of the advantages which attend it.

First, the observance of order serves to correct that negligence which makes you omit some duties, and that hurry and precipitancy which make you perform others imperfectly. Your attention is thereby directed to its proper objects. You follow the straight path which Providence has pointed out to man; in the course of which all the different business of life presents itself regularly to him on every side. God and man, time and eternity, possess their proper stations, arise in succession to his view, and attract his care. Whereas, he who runs on in a disorderly course, speedily involves himself in a labyrinth, where he is surrounded with intricacy and darkness. The crooked paths into which he strikes, turn him aside from the proper line of human pursuit; hide from his sight the objects which he ought chiefly to regard, and bring others under his view, which serve no purpose but to distract and mislead him.

Next, by attending to order, you avoid idleness, that most fruitful source of crimes and evils. Acting upon a plan, meeting every thing in its own place, you constantly find innocent and useful employment for time. You are never at a loss how to dispose of your hours, or to fill up life agreeably. In the course of human action, there are two extremes equally dangerous to virtue; the multiplicity of affairs, and the total want of them. The man of order stands in the middle between these two extremes, and suffers from neither. He is occupied, but not oppressed. Whereas the disorderly, overloading one part of time, and leaving another vacant, are at one period over-

whelmed with business, and at another, either idle through want of employment, or indolent through perplexity. Those seasons of indolence and idleness which recur so often in their life, are their most dangerous moments. The mind, unhappy in its situation, and clinging to every object which can occupy or amuse it, is then aptest to throw itself into the arms of every vice and every folly.

Farther; by the preservation of order, you check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart. It is fond of change; and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct. Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule; which, though at first it may prove constraining, yet by degrees, and from the experience of its happy effects, becomes natural and agreeable. It rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice; and which are distinguishing characteristics of a disorderly mind. It is the parent of steadiness of conduct. It forms consistency of character. It is the ground of all the confidence we repose in one another. For, the disorderly we know not where to find. In him only can we place any trust who is uniform and regular; who lives by principle, not by humour; who acts upon a plan, and not by desultory motions.

The advantages of order hitherto mentioned belong to rectitude of conduct. Consider also how important it is to your self-enjoyment and felicity. Order is the source of peace; and peace is the highest of all temporal blessings. Order is indeed the only region in which tranquillity dwells. The very mention of confusion imports disturbance and

vexation. Is it possible for that man to be happy, who cannot look into the state of his affairs, or the tenour of his conduct, without discerning all to be embroiled; who is either in the midst of remorse for what he has neglected to do, or in the midst of hurry to overtake what he finds, too late, was necessary to have been done? Such as live according to order, may be compared to the celestial bodies, which move in regular courses, and by stated laws; whose influence is beneficent; whose operations are quiet and tranquil. The disorderly resemble those tumultuous elements on earth, which, by sudden and violent irruptions, disturb the course of nature. By mismanagement of affairs, by excess in expence, by irregularity in the indulgence of company and amusement, they are perpetually creating molestation both to themselves and others. They depart from their road to seek pleasure; and instead of it, they every where raise up sorrows. Being always found out of their proper place, they of course interfere and jar with others. The disorders which they raise never fail to spread beyond their own line, and to involve many in confusion and distress; whence they necessarily become the authors of tumult and contention, of discord and enmity. Whereas order is the foundation of union. It allows every man to carry on his own affairs without disturbing his neighbour. It is the golden chain, which holds together the societies of men in friendship and peace.

In fine, the man of order is connected with all the higher powers and principles in the universe. He is the follower of God. He walks with him, and acts upon his plan. His character is formed on the spirit

which religion breathes. For religion in general, and the religion of Christ in particular, may be called the great discipline of order. To *walk sinfully*, and to *walk disorderly*, are synonymous terms in Scripture. From *such as walk disorderly*, we are commanded, *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, to *withdraw ourselves.** The kingdom of Satan is the reign of disorder and darkness. To restore order among the works of God, was the end for which the Son of God descended to the earth. He requires order to be observed in his church. His undertaking is to be consummated in that perfect order which he shall introduce at the last day. In the *new earth and the new heavens*, undisturbed order shall for ever prevail among the *spirits of the just made perfect*; and whatever farther preparation may be requisite for our being admitted to join their society, it is certain that we shall never share in it, unless we make it now our study to *do all things decently, and in order*.

* 2 Thess. iii. 6.

SERMON XVII.

On the Government of the Heart.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise counsels given by this inspired writer, there is none which deserves greater regard than that contained in the text. Its importance, however, is too seldom perceived by the generality of men. They are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. What passes in the mean time within their mind, they suppose to be of no great consequence, either to themselves, or to the world. In opposition to this dangerous plan of morality, the wise man exhorts us *to keep the heart;* that is, to attend not only to our actions, but to our thoughts and desires; and to *keep the heart with all diligence,* that is, with sedulous and unremitting care; for which he assigns this reason, that *out of the heart are the issues of life.*—In discoursing on this subject I purpose to consider, separately, the government of the thoughts, of the passions, and of the temper. But before entering on any of these, let us begin

with inquiring, in what sense *the issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart;* that we may discern the force of the argument which the text suggests, to recommend this great duty of *keeping the heart.*

The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery.

First, It is the state of the heart which determines our moral character. The tenour of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble, or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain, therefore, you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure. *Make the tree good,* as our Saviour directs, *and then its fruits will be good also.* For *out of the heart proceed* not only *evil thoughts,* but *murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* * If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

But it is not merely from its influence on external action that the importance of the heart to our moral character arises. Independent of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow-

* Matth. xv. 19.

creatures, actions must ever hold the chief rank; because, by these only we can judge of one another; by these we effect each other's welfare; and therefore to these alone the regulation of human law extends. But in the eye of that Supreme Being, to whom our whole internal frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which moves us to performance, that constitutes us good or evil in his sight. Even among men, the morality of actions is estimated by the principle from which they are judged to proceed; and such as the principle is, such is the man accounted to be. One, for instance, may spend much of his fortune in charitable actions; and yet, if he is believed to be influenced by mere ostentation, he is deemed not charitable, but vain. He may labour unweariedly to serve the public; but if he is prompted by the desire of rising into power, he is held not public-spirited, but ambitious; and if he bestows a benefit, purely that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and interested. If reason thus clearly teaches us to estimate the value of actions by the dispositions which give them birth, it is an obvious conclusion, that according to those dispositions, we are all ranked and classed by him who seeth into every heart. The rectification of our principles of action, is the primary object of religious discipline; and, in proportion as this is more or less advanced, we are more or less religious. Accordingly, the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

SECONDLY, The state of the heart not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence, than as they operate on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If, from any internal cause, a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honours or riches which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out; and overcast every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, it must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man, than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious, and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good. These are only means, but that is the end. These are no more than instruments of satisfaction; that is satisfaction itself.

Justly it is said by the Wise Man, that *he who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.** All is waste; all is in disorder and ruins within him. He possesses no defence against dangers of any sort. He lies open to every insurrection of ill-humour, and every invasion of distress. Whereas he who is employed

* Prov. xxv. 28.

in regulating his mind, is making provision against all the accidents of life. He is erecting a fortress, into which, in the day of danger, he can retreat with safety. And hence, amidst those endeavours to secure happiness, which incessantly employ the life of man, the careful regulation, or the improvident neglect of the inward frame forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

THUS it appears with how much propriety the *issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart.* Here rise those great springs of human conduct whence the main currents flow of our virtue, or our vice; of our happiness or our misery. Besides this powerful argument for *keeping the heart with all diligence,* I must mention another important consideration taken from the present state of human nature. Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance in watching over it. With too much justice it is said in Scripture, to be *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* Its bias of innate corruption gives it a perpetual tendency downwards into vice and disorder. To direct and impel it upwards, requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you, that almost every desire has a propensity to wander into an improper direction; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your imagination there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care that can be bestowed by the best men on the regulation of the heart, it frequently baffles their efforts to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult then

must it rise, if no vigilance be employed, and no government be exercised over it? Inattention and remissness are all that the great adversary of mankind desires, in order to gain full advantage. While you *sleep, he sows his tares in the field.* The house which he finds vacant and unguarded, he presently *garnishes with evil spirits.*

Add to this, that the human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependence on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole. Suffer but one passion to go out of its place, or to acquire an unnatural force, and presently the balance of the soul will be broken; its powers will jar among themselves, and their operations become discordant. *Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence,* for all thy diligence is here required. And though thine own keeping alone will not avail, unless the assistance of a higher power concur, yet of this be well assured, that no aid from heaven is to be expected, if thou shalt neglect to exert thyself in performing the part assigned thee.

Having now shown the importance of exercising government over the heart, I proceed to consider more particularly in what the government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. All that makes a figure on the great theatre of the world, the employments of the busy, the enterprizes of the ambitious, and the exploits of the warlike, the vir-

tues which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. The secrecy and silence which reign there, favour the prejudice, entertained by too many, that thought is exempted from all control. Passions, they perhaps admit, require government and restraint, because they are violent emotions, and disturb society. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these, as long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given, and no injury committed. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man.

Had they to do with none but their fellow-creatures, such reasoning might be specious. But they ought to remember, that in the sight of the Supreme Being, thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as actions; and that they are, in especial manner, the subjects of Divine jurisdiction, because they are cognizable at no other tribunal. The moral regulation of our thoughts is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart*, and *requireth truth in the inward parts*.

But, even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on con-

duct. It is plain, that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretel with confidence what part he will act, no more were requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone is sufficient to show of what importance the government of thought is to the *keeping of the heart.*

But, supposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, How far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth,* equally rapid in its transitions, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of connections which are too delicate for our observation, it defeats all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be

placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned; and our gracious Creator, who *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*, will not be severe in marking every such errour, and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think, than for what we do.

As, first, when the introduction of any train of thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act; by turning our attention towards such objects, awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments, as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. Next, when thoughts, by whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Though the mind has been passive in their reception, and therefore free from blame; yet, if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first, like unbidden guests; but, if when entered, they are made welcome, and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning. If we be thus accountable to God for thoughts either voluntarily introduced, or deliberately indulged, we are no less so, in the last place, for those which find admittance into our hearts from supine negligence, from total relaxation of attention, from allowing our imagination to rove with entire licence, *like the eyes of the fool towards the ends of the earth.* Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity. They are prostituted to every evil thing

which pleases to take possession. The consequences must all be charged to our account; and in vain we plead excuse from human infirmity. Hence it appears, that the great object at which we are to aim in governing our thoughts, is, to take the most effectual measures for preventing the introduction of such as are sinful, and for hastening their expulsion, if they shall have introduced themselves without consent of the will.

But when we descend into our breasts, and examine how far we have studied to keep this object in view, who can tell *how oft he hath offended?* In no article of religion or morals are men more culpably remiss, than in the unrestrained indulgence they give to fancy; and that too, for most part, without remorse. Since the time that Reason began to exert her power, Thought, during our waking hours, has been active in every breast, without a moment's suspension or pause. The current of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have circulated with perpetual motion. Let me ask, what has been the fruit of this incessant activity with the greatest part of mankind? Of the innumerable hours that have been employed in thought, how few are marked with any permanent or useful effect! How many have either passed away in idle dreams, or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings; to unsocial and malignant passions, or to irregular and criminal desires! Had I power to lay open that store-house of iniquity, which the hearts of too many conceal; could I draw out and read to them a list of all the imaginations they have devised, and all the passions they have indulged in secret, what a picture of men would I present to themselves!

What crimes would they appear to have perpetrated in fancy, which to their most intimate companions they durst not reveal!

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be innocently employed, they too commonly suffer them to run out into extravagant imaginations, and chimerical plans of what they could wish to attain, or choose to be, if they could frame the course of things according to their desire. Though such employments of fancy come not under the same description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable they seldom are. Besides the waste of time which they occasion, and the misapplication which they indicate of those intellectual powers that were given to us for much nobler purposes, such romantic speculation leads us always into the neighbourhood of forbidden regions. They place us on dangerous ground. They are for the most part connected with some one bad passion; and they always nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of thought. They unfit the mind for applying with vigour to rational pursuits, or for acquiescing in sober plans of conduct. From that ideal world in which it allows itself to dwell, it returns, to the commerce of men, unbent and relaxed, sickly and tainted, averse from discharging the duties, and sometimes disqualified even for relishing the pleasures of ordinary life. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee.* * — In order to guard against all such corruption and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be profitable to attend to the following rules:

* Jerem. iv. 15.

In the first place, study to acquire the habit of attention to thought. No study is more important, for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed, such commonly is the degree of intellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected rovings, they pursue no end; they follow no track. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the face of the waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourself to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut against intrusions of wandering fancy. Let your mind, for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review. — "To what is my attention at present "directed? Could I disclose it without a blush to "the world? Were God instantly to call me into "judgment, what account could I give of it to him? "Shall I be the wiser or the better for dwelling on "such thoughts as now fill my mind? Are they "entirely consistent with my innocence, and with "my present and future peace? If they are not, "to what purpose do I indulge such unprofitable "or dangerous musings?" — By frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny, we might gradually bring imagination under discipline, and turn the powers

of thought to their proper use as means of improvement, instead of suffering them to be only the instruments of vanity and guilt.

In the second place, in order to the government of thought, it is necessary to guard against idleness. Idleness is the great fomenter of all corruptions in the human heart. In particular, it is the parent of loose imaginations and inordinate desires. The ever active and restless power of thought, if not employed about what is good, will naturally and unavoidably engender evil. Imagine not that mere occupation, of whatever kind it be, will exempt you from the blame and danger of an idle life. Perhaps the worst species of idleness is a dissipated, though seemingly busy life, spent in the haunts of loose society, and in the chace of perpetual amusement. Hence a giddy mind, alternately elated and dejected with trifles, occupied with no recollection of the past but what is fruitless, and with no plans for the future but what are either frivolous or guilty.

As, therefore, you would govern your thoughts, or indeed as you would have any thoughts that are worthy of being governed, provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. Keep knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, ever in view. Let your life proceed in a train of such pursuits as are worthy of a Christian, of a rational and social being. While these are regularly carried on as the main business of life, let amusement possess no more than its proper place in the distribution of your time. Take particular care that your amusements be of an irreproachable kind, and that all your society be either improving or inno-

cent. So shall the stream of your thoughts be made to run in a pure channel. Manly occupations and virtuous principles will expel the taint, which idleness never fails to communicate to the vacant mind.

In the third place, when criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Take example from the unhappy industry which sinners discover in banishing good ones, when a natural sense of religion forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves! How studiously do they drown the voice which upbraids them in the noise of company or diversion! What numerous artifices do they employ to evade the uneasiness which returns of reflection would produce! — Were we to use equal diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious suggestions, or in expelling them when entered, why should we not be equally successful in a much better cause? As soon as you are sensible that any dangerous passion begins to ferment, instantly call in other passions, and other ideas, to your aid. Hasten to turn your thoughts into a different direction. Summon up whatever you have found to be of power for composing and harmonizing your mind. Fly for assistance to serious studies, to prayer, and devotion; or even fly to business, or innocent society, if solitude be in hazard of favouring the seduction. By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil. You may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect.

In the fourth place, it will be particularly useful to impress your minds with an habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we reflect what a strong check the belief of divine omniscience is calculated to give to all criminal thoughts, we are tempted to suspect that even by Christians this article of faith is not received with sincere conviction. For who but must confess, that if he knew a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, to have the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself that unbounded scope which he now gives to his imagination and desire? Whence, then, comes it to pass, that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful Majesty of Heaven, that folly and licentiousness of thought which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could descry it? At the same time, no principle is supported by clearer evidence, than the omniscience of God. All religious sects have admitted it, all societies of men, in their oaths and covenants, appeal to it. The Sovereign of the universe cannot but know what passes throughout his dominions. He who supports all nature, must needs pervade and fill it. He who formed the heart, is certainly conscious to what passes within it.

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing eye of divine observation, which *never slumbers nor sleeps*. Behold a pen always writing over your head, and making up that great record of your thoughts, words, and actions, from which at last you are to be judged. Think that you are never less alone, than when by yourselves; for then is he still

with you, whose inspection is of greater consequence than that of all mankind. Let these awful considerations not only check the dissipation of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of meditation and wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce in its stead what is pure and holy; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and acting as the counterpoise to those attractions of the world which would draw your whole attention downwards to sense and vanity.

SERMON XVIII.

The same Subject continued.

Proverbs, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

HAVING treated, in the foregoing Discourse, of the government of the thoughts, I proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the *keeping of the Heart.*

Passions are strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehending good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature; and therefore to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires no more of us, than to moderate and rule them. When our blessed Lord assumed the nature, without the corruption, of man, he was subject to like passions with us. On some occasions, he felt the risings of anger. He was often touched with pity. He was *grieved in spirit;* he sorrowed, and he wept.

Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They rouse the dormant powers of the soul. They are even found to exalt them. They often raise a man above himself, and

render him more penetrating, vigorous, and masterly, than he is in his calmer hours. Actuated by some high passion, he conceives great designs, and surmounts all difficulties in the execution. He is inspired with more lofty sentiments, and endowed with more persuasive utterance, than he possesses at any other time. Passions are the active forces of the soul. They are its highest powers brought into movement and exertion. But like all other great powers, they are either useful or destructive, according to their direction and degree; as wind and fire are instrumental in carrying on many of the beneficent operations of nature; but when they rise to undue violence, or deviate from their proper course, their path is marked with ruin.

It is the present infelicity of human nature, that those strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle which ought to regulate them. This is one of the unhappy consequences of our apostacy from God, that the influence of reason is weakened, and that of passion strengthened within the heart. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself; and, from being originally the ministers of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles: first, that through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects; and next, that even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess; they always hurry us towards their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. On these two points then turns the whole government of our passions: first,

to ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit; and next, to restrain them in that pursuit, when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. If there be any passion which intrudes itself unseasonably into our mind, which darkens and troubles our judgment, or habitually discomposes our temper; which unfits us for properly discharging the duties, or disqualifies us for cheerfully enjoying the comforts of life, we may certainly conclude it to have gained a dangerous ascendant. The great object which we ought to propose to ourselves is, to acquire a firm and stedfast mind, which the infatuation of passion shall not seduce, nor its violence shake; which, resting on fixed principles, shall, in the midst of contending emotions, remain free and master of itself; able to listen calmly to the voice of conscience, and prepared to obey its dictates without hesitation.

To obtain, if possible, such command of passion, is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. Arguments to show its importance crowd upon us from every quarter. If there be any fertile source of mischief to human life, it is, beyond doubt, the misrule of passion. It is this which poisons the enjoyment of individuals, overturns the order of society, and strews the path of life with so many miseries, as to render it indeed the valley of tears. All those great scenes of public calamity, which we behold with astonishment and horrour, have originated from the source of violent passions. These have overspread the earth with bloodshed. These have pointed the assassin's dagger, and filled the poisoned bowl. These, in every age, have furnished too copious materials for the orator's pathetic declamation, and for the poet's tragical song.

When from public life we descend to private conduct, though passion operate not there in such a wide and destructive sphere, we shall find its influence to be no less baneful. I need not mention the black and fierce passions, such as envy, jealousy, and revenge, whose effects are obviously noxious, and whose agitations are immediate misery. But take any of the licentious and sensual kind. Suppose it to have unlimited scope; trace it throughout its course; and you will find that gradually, as it rises, it taints the soundness, and troubles the peace, of his mind over whom it reigns; that in its progress, it engages him in pursuits which are marked either with danger or with shame; that in the end, it wastes his fortune, destroys his health, or debases his character; and aggravates all the miseries in which it has involved him, with the concluding pangs of bitter remorse. Through all the stages of this fatal course, how many have heretofore run! What multitudes do we daily behold pursuing it, with blind and headlong steps!

But, on the evils which flow from unrestrained passions, it is needless to enlarge. Hardly are there any so ignorant or inconsiderate as not to admit, that where passion is allowed to reign, both happiness and virtue must be impaired. I proceed therefore to what is of more consequence, to suggest some directions which may be useful in assisting us to preserve the government of our passions.

In the first place, we must study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. The erroneous opinions which we form concerning happiness and misery, give rise to all the mistaken and dangerous

passions which embroil our life. We suffer ourselves to be dazzled by unreal appearances of pleasure. We follow, with precipitancy, whithersoever the crowd leads. We admire, without examination, what our predecessors have admired. We fly from every shadow at which we see others tremble. Thus, agitated by vain fears and deceitful hopes, we are hurried into eager contests about objects which are in themselves of no value. By rectifying our opinions, we should strike at the root of the evil. If our vain imaginations were chastened, the tumult of our passions would subside.

It is observed, that the young and the ignorant are always the most violent in pursuit. The knowledge which is forced upon them by longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuosity. Study then to anticipate, by reflection, that knowledge which experience often purchases at too dear a price. Inure yourselves to frequent consideration of the emptiness of those pleasures which excite so much strife and commotion among mankind. Think how much more of true enjoyment is lost by the violence of passion, than by the want of those things which give occasion to that passion. Persuade yourselves, that the favour of God and the possession of virtue form the chief happiness of the rational nature. Let a contented mind, and a peaceful life, hold the next place in your estimation. These are the conclusions which the wise and thinking part of mankind have always formed. To these conclusions, after having run the race of passion, you will probably come at the last. By forming them betimes, you would make a seasonable escape from that tempestuous region; through which none can pass with-

out suffering misery, contracting guilt, and undergoing severe remorse.

In the second place, in order to attain the command of passion, it is requisite to acquire the power of self-denial. The self-denial of a Christian consists not in perpetual austerity of life, and universal renunciation of the innocent comforts of the world. Religion requires no such unnecessary sacrifices, nor is any such foe to present enjoyment. It consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to suffering, for the sake of duty and conscience, or from a view to some higher and more extensive good. If we possess not this power, we shall be the prey of every loose inclination that chances to arise. Pampered by continual indulgence, all our passions will become mutinous and headstrong. Desire, not reason, will be the ruling principle of our conduct.

As, therefore, you would keep your passions within due bounds, you must betimes accustom them to know the reins. You must not wait till some critical occasion for the exercise of self-denial occur. In vain you will attempt to act with authority, if your first essay be made when temptation has inflamed the mind. In cooler hours, you must sometimes abridge your enjoyment even of what is innocent. In the midst of lawful pleasure, you must maintain moderation, abstemiousness, and self-command. The observance of this discipline is the only method of supporting reason in its proper ascendant. For if you allow yourselves always to stretch to the utmost point of innocence and safety, beyond that point you will infallibly be hurried, when passion shall arise in its might to shake the heart.

In the third place, impress your minds deeply with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be when you are under the power of passion. Be assured, that no judgment which you then form, can be in the least depended upon as sound or true. The fumes which arise from a heart boiling with violent passions, never fail to darken and trouble the understanding. When the gourd withered, under the shade of which the prophet Jonah reposed, his mind, already ruffled by the disappointment of his predictions, lost, on occasion of this slight incident, all command of itself; and in the midst of his impatience, he *wished to die rather than to live.* Instead of being calmed by that expostulating voice, *Dost thou well, O Jonah! to be angry because of the gourd?* he replied with great emotion, *I do well to be angry even unto death.* But did Jonah think so when his passion had abated? Do these sentiments bear the least resemblance to that humble and devout prayer, which, on another occasion, when in his calm mind, he put up to God?* No two persons can differ more from each other, than the same person differs from himself, when agitated by passion, and when master of his reason. *I do well to be angry,* is the language of every man when his mind is inflamed. Every passion justifies itself. It brings in a thousand pretences to its aid. It borrows many a false colour, to hide its deformity. It possesses a sort of magic, by which it can magnify or diminish objects at pleasure, and transform the appearance of every thing within its sphere.

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practises, place you continually on your guard. Let the remembrance of it be ever at hand, to check the extravagant judgments which you are apt to pass in those moments of delusion. Listen to no suggestion which then arises. Form no conclusions on which you are to act. Assure yourselves that every thing is beheld through a false medium. Have patience for a little, and the illusion will vanish; the atmosphere will clear up around you, and objects return to be viewed in their native colours and just dimensions.

In the fourth place, oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method, either of allaying its violence, or of escaping to a calmer shore. Hasten to call up emotions of an opposite nature. Study to conquer one passion, by means of some other which is of less dangerous tendency. Never account any thing small or trivial which is in hazard of introducing disorder into your heart. Never make light of any desire which you feel gaining such progress as to threaten entire dominion. Blandishing it will appear at the first. As a gentle and innocent emotion, it may steal into the heart; but as it advances, it is likely to *pierce you through with many sorrows.* What you indulged as a favourite amusement, will shortly become a serious business; and in the end may prove the burden of your life. Most of our passions flatter us in their rise. But, their beginnings are treacherous; their growth is imperceptible; and the evils which they carry in

their train lie concealed, until their dominion is established. What Solomon says of one of them, holds true of them all, that their *beginning is as when one letteth out water.* * It issues from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped; but, being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream; till the bank is at last totally thrown down, and the flood is at liberty to deluge the whole plain.

In the fifth place, the excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. The imaginary degree of importance which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on temporal things, is one great cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuit. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of the destination of man, would naturally cool his misplaced ardour. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs, as to discompose or agitate the mind of him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of the universe of God? How contemptible will seem to him this hurry of spirits, this turmoil of passion, about things which are so soon to end?—Where are they who once disturbed the world with the violence of their contests, and filled it with the renown of their exploits? What now remains of their designs and enterprises, of their passions and pursuits, of their triumphs and their glory? The flood of time has passed over them, and swept them away, as if

* Prov. xvii. 14.

they had never been. The *fashion of the world* changes continually around us. We succeed one another in the human course, like troops of pilgrims on their journey. Absurdly we spend our time in contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher existence. Eternity is just at hand to close this introductory scene. It is fast rolling towards us, like the tide of a vast ocean, ready to swallow up all human concerns, and to leave no trace behind it, except the consequences of our good or bad deeds, which shall last for ever.——Let such reflections allay the heat of passion. Let them reduce all human things to their proper standard. From frivolous pursuits let them recall our attention to objects of real importance; to the proper business of man; to the improvement of our nature, the discharge of our duty, the rational and religious conduct of human life.

In the last place, to our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, divine assistance is requisite. For such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to discover all the disorders of our heart, is become difficult; much more, to rectify them, is beyond our power. To that superiour aid, then, which is promised to the pious and upright, let us look up with humble minds; beseeching the Father of mercies, that while we study to act our own part with resolution and vigilance, he would forgive our returning weakness; would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion; and enable us by his grace so to

govern our minds, that without considerable interruptions we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

It now remains to treat of the government of temper, as included in the *keeping of the heart.* Passions are quick and strong emotions, which by degrees subside. Temper is the disposition which remains after these emotions are past, and which forms the habitual propensity of the soul. The passions are like the stream when it is swoln by the torrent, and ruffled by the winds. The temper resembles it when running within its bed, with its natural velocity and force. The influence of temper is more silent and imperceptible than that of passion. It operates with less violence; but as its operation is constant, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that it highly deserves to be considered in a religious view.

Many, indeed, are averse to behold it in this light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural felicity which some enjoy; but for the want of which, others are not morally culpable, nor accountable to God; and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine of which the Gospel is so full, that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose that grace might dwell amidst malevolence and rancour, and that heaven might be enjoyed by such as are strangers to charity and love. —It will readily be admitted, that some, by the

original frame of their mind, are more favourably inclined than others towards certain good dispositions and habits. But this affords no justification to those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone. Let no man imagine that the human heart is a soil altogether unsusceptible of culture; or that the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. Settled depravity of temper is always owing to our own indulgence. If, in place of checking, we nourish that malignity of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences will be placed to our account, and every excuse from natural constitution be rejected at the tribunal of Heaven.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation which he bears; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties. This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in one discourse. But it may be useful to take a general view of it; and before we conclude the doctrine of *keeping the heart*, to show what the habitual temper of a good man ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

First, with respect to God, what he ought to cultivate is a devout temper. This imports more than the care of performing the offices of religious worship. It denotes the sensibility of heart towards the Supreme Being, which springs from a deep impression of his perfection on the soul. It stands opposed, not only to that disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that absence of

religious affections which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. They acknowledge, perhaps, the obligations of duty. They feel some concern to *work out their salvation.* But they apply to their duty through mere constraint; and serve God without affection or complacency. More liberal and generous sentiments animate the man who is of a devout temper. God dwells upon his thoughts as a benefactor and a father, to whose voice he hearkens with joy. Amidst the occurrences of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of his wisdom, the reverence of his power, the love of his transcendant goodness. All nature appears to his view as stamped with the impress of these perfections. Habitual gratitude to his Maker for mercies past, and cheerful resignation to his will in all time to come, are the native effusions of his heart.

Such a temper as this deserves to be cultivated with the utmost attention; for it contributes, in a high degree, both to our improvement and our happiness. It refines, and it exalts human nature. It softens that hardness which our hearts are ready to contract from frequent intercourse with this rugged world. It facilitates the discharge of every duty towards God and man. At the same time it is a temper peaceful and serene, elevated and rejoicing. It forms the current of our affections to flow in a placid tenour. It opens pleasing prospects to the mind. It banishes harsh and bitter passions; and places us above the reach of many of the annoyances of worldly life. When the temper is truly devout, *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth the heart and soul.* I proceed,

SECONDLY, To point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. It is evident, in the general, that if we consult either public welfare or private happiness, Christian charity ought to regulate our disposition in mutual intercourse. But as this great principle admits of several diversified appearances, let us consider some of the chief forms under which it ought to show itself in the usual tenour of life. Universal benevolence to mankind, when it rests in the abstract, is a loose indeterminate idea, rather than a principle of real effect; and too often floats as an useless speculation in the head, instead of affecting the temper and the heart.

What first presents itself to be recommended, is a peaceable temper; a disposition averse to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony, and amicable intercourse in society. This supposes yielding and condescending manners, unwillingness to contend with others about trifles, and, in contests that are unavoidable, proper moderation of spirit. Such a temper is the first principle of self-enjoyment. It is the basis of all order and happiness among mankind. The positive and contentious, the rude and quarrelsome, are the bane of society. They seem destined to blast the small share of comfort which nature has here allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they break their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosom, before it is let forth upon the world. In the tempest which they raise, they are always tost; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper must be supported by a candid one, or a disposition to view the conduct of others with fairness and impartiality. This stands

opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which ascribes every action to the worst motive, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this malignant spirit. Study that charity *which thinketh no evil;* that temper which, without degenerating into credulity, will dispose you to be just; and which can allow you to observe an error, without imputing it as a crime, Thus you will be kept free from that continual irritation which imaginary injuries raise in a suspicious breast; and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable, and to be candid, is not all that is required of a good man. He must cultivate a kind, generous, and sympathizing temper which feels for distress, wherever it is beheld; which enters into the concerns of his friends with ardour; and to all with whom he has intercourse, is gentle, obliging, and humane. How amiable appears such a disposition, when contrasted with a malicious or envious temper, which wraps itself up in its own narrow interest, looks with an evil eye on the success of others, and with an unnatural satisfaction feeds on their disappointments or miseries! How little does he know of the true happiness of life, who is a stranger to that intercourse of good offices and kind affections, which, by a pleasing charm, attach men to one another, and circulate joy from heart to heart!

You are not to imagine, that a benevolent temper finds no exercise, unless when opportunities offer of performing actions of high generosity, or of extensive utility. These may seldom occur. The condition

of the greater part of mankind, in a good measure, precludes them. But in the ordinary round of human affairs a thousand occasions daily present themselves, of mitigating the vexations which others suffer, of smoothing their minds, of aiding their interest, of promoting their cheerfulness or ease. Such occasions may relate to the smaller incidents of life. But let us remember, that of small incidents the system of human life is chiefly composed. The attentions which respect these, when suggested by real benignity of temper, are often more material to the happiness of those around us, than actions which carry the appearance of greater dignity and splendour. No wise or good man ought to account any rules of behaviour as below his regard, which tend to cement the great brotherhood of mankind in comfortable union.

Particularly amidst that familiar intercourse which belongs to domestic life, all the virtues of temper find an ample range. It is very unfortunate, that within that circle, men too often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to the caprice of passion and humour. Whereas there, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their heart; to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There the real character displays itself. The forms of the world disguise men when abroad. But within his own family, every man is known to be what he truly is. — In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us cultivate a peaceable, a candid, a gentle and friendly temper. This is the temper to

which, by repeated injunctions, our holy religion seeks to form us. This was the temper of Christ. This is the temper of Heaven.

We are now to consider, thirdly, The proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all the good dispositions which belong to this head, is humility. By this I understand, not that meanness of spirit which leads a man to undervalue himself, and to sink below his rank and character; but what the Scripture expresses with great propriety, when it exhorts *every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.* * He who adopts all the flattering suggestions of self-love, and forms claims upon the world proportioned to the imaginary opinion which he has conceived of his merit, is preparing for himself a thousand mortifications. Whereas, by checking the risings of ill-founded vanity, and retreating within those bounds which a moderate estimation of our character prescribes, we escape the miseries which always pursue an arrogant mind, and recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

Hence will naturally arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to the proper discharge of the duties of every station. For, a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards men, provoking and unjust. It is a

* Rom. xii. 3.

gangrene, which preys on the vitals, and infects the whole constitution with disease and putrefaction. Subdue pride and vanity, and you will take the most effectual method of eradicating this distemper. You will no longer behold the objects around you with jaundiced eyes. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow, and the degree of favour which your fellow-creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying so many good things, than discontented, because there are many which you want.

From a humble and contented temper will spring a cheerful one. This, if not in itself a virtue, is at least the garb in which virtue should be always arrayed. Piety and goodness ought never to be marked with that dejection which sometimes takes rise from superstition, but which is the proper portion only of guilt. At the same time, the cheerfulness belonging to virtue is to be carefully distinguished from that light and giddy temper which characterizes folly, and is so often found among the dissipated and vicious part of mankind. Their gaiety is owing to a total want of reflexion; and brings with it the usual consequences of an unthinking habit, shame, remorse, and heaviness of heart, in the end. The cheerfulness of a well-regulated mind springs from a good conscience and the favour of Heaven, and is bounded by temperance and reason. It makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and 'm sunshine of a mind illuminated by piety and

virtue. It crowns all other good dispositions, and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

SUCH, on the whole, is the temper, or habitual frame of mind, in a good man: Devout towards God; towards men peaceable, candid, affectionate, and humane; within himself humble, contented, and cheerful. To the establishment of this happy temper, all the directions which I before suggested for the due regulation of the thoughts, and for the government of the passions naturally conduce; in this they ought to issue; and when this temper is thoroughly formed within us, then may the heart be esteemed to have been *kept with all diligence*. That we may be thus enabled to keep it, for the sake both of present enjoyment, and of preparation for greater happiness, let us earnestly pray to Heaven. A greater blessing we cannot implore of the Almighty, than that he who made the human heart, and who knows its frailties, would assist us to subject it to that discipline which religion requires, which reason approves, but which his grace alone can enable us to maintain.

SERMON XIX.

On the Unchangeableness of the Divine Nature.

James, i. 17.

Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love; in others, commands our reverence; in all, is entitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts, in a proper manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved; and if at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts, his moral perfections always afford us relief. His almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and supreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For, hence are derived the regular order of nature, and the stedfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenour of those laws which, from age to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises

which are the ground of our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might decrease. The contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable in his nature and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction and of consolation to man. I shall first endeavour to illustrate, in some degree, the nature of the divine immutability; and then make application of it to our own conduct.

Every good and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of Lights. The title which in the text is given to the Deity, carries an elegant allusion to the Sun, the source of light, the most universal benefactor of nature, the most regular and constant of all the great bodies with which we are acquainted in the universe. Yet even with the Sun there are certain degrees of *variableness.* He apparently rises and sets; he seems to approach nearer to us in summer, and to retire farther off in winter; his influence is varied by the seasons, and his lustre is affected by the clouds. Whereas with him who is the *Father of Lights*, of whose everlasting brightness the glory of the Sun is but a faint image, there is no *shadow of turning*, nor the most distant approach to change. In his being or essence it is plain that alteration can never take place. For as his existence is derived from no prior cause, nor dependent on any thing without himself, his nature can be influenced by no power, can be affected by no accident, can be im-

paired by no time. From everlasting to everlasting, he continues the same. Hence it is said, that *he only hath immortality;* that is, he possesses it in a manner incommunicable to all other beings. Eternity is described as the *high and holy place in which he dwelleth;* it is a habitation in which none but the *Father of Lights* can enter. The name which he taketh to himself is, *I am.* Of other things, some have been and others shall be; but this is he, *which is, which was, and which is to come.* All time is his; it is measured out by him in limited portions to the various orders of created beings; but his own existence fills equally every point of duration; *the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superiour cause. But as no higher cause can bring from without any accession to the divine nature, so within itself it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being was from the beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence, with much propriety, the divine perfections are described in Scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong mountains. His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.* These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint sha-

dows. The justice of men is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indulgence towards all. But goodness and justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular and constant tenour. Among men, they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God, they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations towards mankind, in his counsels and decrees, in his laws, his promises, and in his threatenings, there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning* with the Almighty. *Known to him from the beginning were all his works.* In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realised the great plan which, from everlasting, he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce. Whatever the counsels of men can effect, was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprize him. No agitations of anger or of sorrow, of fear or of hope, can shake his mind or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession of that supreme beatitude, which neither the virtues nor the crimes of men can in the

least affect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and, what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end.* In Scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said to *be grieved,* and *to repent.* But such expressions, it is obvious, are employed from accommodation to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are, in other passages, ascribed to God. The Scripture, as a rule of life addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature, represented in its native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. When, upon the reformation of sinners, God is said to *repent of the evil* which he hath threatened against them; this intimates no more than that he suits his dispensations to the alterations which take place in the characters of men. His disposition towards good and evil continues the same, but varies in its application as its objects vary; just as the laws themselves, which are capable of no change of affection, bring rewards or punishments at different times to the same person, according as his behaviour alters. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect can never vary, and that the great Governor of the universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

From the contemplation of this obvious, but fundamental truth, let us proceed to the practical improvement of it. Let us consider what effect the serious consideration of it ought to produce on our mind and behaviour.

It will be proper to begin this head of discourse by removing an objection which the doctrine I have illustrated may appear to form against religious services, and in particular against the duty of prayer. To what purpose, it may be urged, is homage addressed to a Being whose purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom *our righteousness extendeth not;* whom by no arguments we can persuade, and by no supplications we can mollify? The objection would have weight, if our religious addresses were designed to work any alteration on God; either by giving him information of what he did not know; or by exciting affections which he did not possess; or by inducing him to change measures which he had previously formed. But they are only crude and imperfect notions of religion which can suggest such ideas. The change which our devotions are intended to make, is upon ourselves not upon the Almighty. Their chief efficacy is derived from the good dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human soul. By pouring out pious sentiments and desires before God, by adoring his perfection, and confessing our own unworthiness, by expressing our dependence on his aid, our gratitude for his past favours, our submission to his present will, our trust in his future mercy, we cultivate such affections as suit our place and station in the universe, and are thereby prepared for becoming objects of the divine grace. Accordingly, frequent assurances are given us in Scripture,

that the prayers of sincere worshippers, preferred through the great Mediator, shall be productive of the happiest effects. *When they ask, they shall receive; when they seek, they shall find; when they knock, it shall be opened to them.* Prayer is appointed to be the channel for conveying the divine grace to mankind, because the wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful means of improving the human heart.

When religious homage is considered in this light, as a great instrument of spiritual and moral improvement, all the objections which scepticism can form from the divine immutability, conclude with no more force against prayer, than against every other mean of improvement which reason has suggested to man. If prayer be superfluous, because God is unchangeable, we might upon similar grounds conclude, that it is needless to labour the earth, to nourish our bodies, or to cultivate our minds, because the fertility of the ground, the continuance of our life, and the degree of our understanding, depend upon an immutable Sovereign, and were from all eternity foreseen by him. Such absurd conclusions reason has ever repudiated. To every plain and sound understanding it has clearly dictated, that to explore the unknown purposes of Heaven belongs not to us; but that He who decrees the end, certainly requires the means; and that, in the diligent employment of all the means which can advance either our temporal or spiritual felicity, the chief exertions of human wisdom and human duty consist. Assuming it then for an undoubted principle, that religion is a reasonable service, and that, though with the *Father of Lights* there be *no variableness*, the homage of his creatures is

nevertheless, for the wisest reasons, required by him, I proceed to show what sentiments the contemplation of divine immutability should raise in our minds, and what duties it should chiefly enforce.

I. Let it excite us to admire and adore. Filled with profound reverence, let us look up to that Supreme Being who sits from everlasting on the throne of the universe; moving all things, but remaining immoveable himself; directing every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events or of time. He beholds the heavens and the earth *wax old as a garment, and decay like a vesture.* At their appointed periods he raises up, or he dissolves worlds. But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered.—The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world strikes the mind with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the contemplation of an object so sublime as the eternal and unchangeable Ruler of the universe! The composure and stillness of thought introduced by such a meditation, has a powerful tendency both to purify and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devotion; and accompanies devotion with that profound reverence, which guards it from every improper excess. When we consider the Supreme Being as employed in works of love; when we think of his condescension to the human race in sending his Son to dwell on the earth; encouraged by

favours, and warmed by gratitude, we are sometimes in danger of presuming too much on his goodness, and of indulging a certain fondness of affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent state. It is necessary that he should frequently appear to our minds in all that majesty with which the immutability of his nature clothes him; in order that reverence may be combined with love, and that a mixture of sacred awe may chasten the rapturous effusions of warm devotion. Servile fear, indeed, would crush the spirit of ingenuous and affectionate homage. But that reverence which springs from elevated conceptions of the divine nature, has a happy effect in checking the forwardness of imagination, restraining our affections within due bounds, and composing our thoughts at the same time that it exalts them.

When, from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But what is man, with all his advantages and boasted powers, before the eternal *Father of Lights?* With God there is no variableness; with man there is no stability. Virtue and vice divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendship, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and

often led to change it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is surrounded with fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too is swept away. Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator inspire him with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connection with his greatness. The description which is given of him in the text, calls, in this view, for our particular attention. It presents to us the most amiable union of condescension with majesty, of the moral with the natural perfections of God, which can possibly be exhibited to the imagination of man. *From the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, cometh down every good and perfect gift.* The most independent of all Beings is represented as the most beneficent. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied Giver of every thing that is good. — Let such views of the divine nature not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate what we adore. Let them shew us that benevolence is divine; that to stoop from our fancied grandeur in order to assist

and relieve one another, is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honour, and our nearest resemblance to *the Father of Lights*.

II. Let the consideration of the divine immutability convince us, that the method of attaining the favour of Heaven is one and invariable. Were the Almighty a capricious and inconstant Being, like man, we should be at a loss what tenour of conduct to hold. In order to conciliate his grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed principle of his inclination, sometimes to another; and, bewildered amidst various attempts, would be overwhelmed with dismay. The guilty would essay to flatter him. The timid, sometimes by austere mortifications, sometimes by costly gifts, sometimes by obsequious rites, would try to appease him. Hence, in fact, have arisen all the corruptions of religious worship among men; from their forming the divine character upon their own, and ascribing to the Sovereign of the Universe the mutability of human passions. God is represented by the psalmist David as saying to the wicked, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.** This continues to be the description of all the superstitious and enthusiastic sects, which, since the days of David, have sprung up in the world.

It is our peculiar happiness, under the Gospel, to have God revealed to us in his genuine character; as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. We know that at no time there is any change either in his affections, or in the plan of his administration.

* Psalm l. 21.

One light always shines upon us from above. One clear and direct path is always pointed out to man. The Supreme Being is, and was, and ever will be, the supporter of order and virtue; *the righteous Lord loving righteousness.* The external forms of religion may vary; but under all dispensations which proceed from God, its substance is the same. It tends continually to one point, the purification of man's heart and life. This was the object of the original law of nature. This was the scope of the Mosaic institution amidst all its sacrifices and rites; and this is unquestionably the end of the Gospel. So invariably constant is God to this purpose, that the dispensation of mercy in Christ Jesus, which admits of the vicarious atonement and righteousness of a Redeemer, makes no change in our obligation to fulfil the duties of a good life. The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the end of time the moral law continues in its full force; and that *till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in nowise pass from it.* * This is the only institution known to men, whose authority is unchanging and constant. Human laws rise and fall with the empires that gave them birth. Systems of philosophy vary with the progress of knowledge and light. Manners, sentiments, and opinions, alter with the course of time. But throughout all ages, and amidst all revolutions, the rule of moral and religious conduct is the same. It partakes of that immutability of the divine nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this day, to us; and such it shall remain to our posterity for ever.

* Matth. v. 18.

III. Let the contemplation of this perfection of the divine nature teach us to imitate, as far as our frailty will permit, that constancy and steadfastness which we adore. All the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are standards of character towards which we ought to aspire. But as in all these perfections there are properties peculiar to the divine nature, our endeavours to resemble them are laid under great restrictions by the dissimilarity between our nature and the divine. With respect to that attribute which we now consider, the circumstances are evident which preclude improper imitation. To man it is frequently necessary to correct his errours, and to change his conduct. An attempt, therefore, to continue wholly invariable, would, in our situation, be no other than imprudent and criminal obstinacy. But withall, the immediate rectitude of the Deity should lead us to aspire after fixedness of principle, and uniformity in conduct, as the glory of the rational nature. Impressed with the sense of that supreme excellence which results from unchanging goodness, faithfulness, and truth, let us become ashamed of that levity which degrades the human character. Let us *ponder our paths*, act upon a well-regulated plan, and remain consistent with ourselves. Contemplating the glory of the Father of Lights, let us aim at being transformed, in some degree, *into the same image, from glory to glory*. Finally,

IV. Let the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. This is one of the chief improvements to be made of the

subject, and therefore requires full illustration. There are three lights in which we may view the benefit redounding to us from that attribute of God which we now consider. It assures us of the constancy of Nature; of the regular administration of Providence; of the certain accomplishment of all the divine promises.

First, It gives us ground to depend on the constant and uniform course of Nature. On the unchangeableness of God rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of Nature, are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because He is *without variableness or shadow of turning*, that those laws have continued the same since the beginning of the world; that the Sun so constantly observes his time of rising and going down; that the seasons annually return; the tides periodically ebb and flow; the earth yields its fruit at stated intervals; and the human body and mental powers advance to maturity by a regular progress. In all those motions and operations which are incessantly going on throughout nature, there is no stop nor interruption; no change nor innovation; no deflection from their main scope. The same powerful and steady hand which gave the first impulse to the powers of nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed line. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause, we calculate the effect; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

Accustomed from our infancy to this constancy in Nature, we are hardly sensible of the blessing. Familiarity has the same effect here, as in many other enjoyments, to efface gratitude. But let us, for a moment, take an opposite view of things. Let us suppose, that we had any cause to dread capriciousness, or change, in the Power who rules the course of Nature; any ground to suspect that, but for one day, the Sun might not rise, nor the current of the waters hold their usual course, nor the laws of motion and vegetation proceed as we have been accustomed to behold them. What dismay would instantly fill all hearts! What horror would seem to overspread the whole face of Nature! What part could we act, or whither could we run, in the midst of convulsions, which overturned all the measures we had formed for happiness, or for safety? The present abode of man would then become, as Job describes the region of the grave, *a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and the shadow of death; without any order; and where the light is as* * *darkness.* With what joy ought we then to recognise an unvarying and stedfast Ruler, under whose dominion we have no such disasters to dread; but can depend on the course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the period shall arrive of its final dissolution!

But though the great laws of Nature be constant like their Author, yet in the affairs of men, there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise

* Job, x. 22.

reasons, left, in a great measure, uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things explored with this view. There is nothing on earth so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up, they incessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike subject to reverse. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting round us.——Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise and righteous Sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning?* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. That *river* perpetually flows, *the streams whereof make glad the city of God.* We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it to the last. Under his government none of those revolutions happen which have place among the kingdoms of the earth; where princes die, and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. But *the throne of the Lord is established*

for ever; and the thoughts of his heart endure to all generations. We serve the same God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events and all ages; establishes a connecting principle which holds together the past, the present, and the future; gives stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may *the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad,* because there reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord.

Were you to unhinge this great article of faith; were you either to *say with the fool,* that there is *no God,* or to suppose with the superstitious, that the God who rules is variable and capricious; you would, indeed, *lay the axe to the root of the tree,* and cut down, with one blow, the hope and security of mankind. For you would then leave nothing in the whole compass of nature, but a round of casual and transitory being; no foundation of trust, no protection to the righteous, no stedfast principle to uphold and to regulate the succession of existence. Instead of that magnificent spectacle which the world now exhibits, when beheld in connection with the divine government, it would then only present to view a multitude of short-lived creatures, springing out of the dust, wandering on the face of the earth without guide or protector, struggling for a few years against the torrent of uncertainty and change; and then sinking into utter oblivion, and vanishing like visions of the night. Mysterious obscurity would involve the beginning of things; disorder would mark their progress; and the blackness of darkness would cover

their final result. Whereas, when Faith enables us to recover an universal Sovereign, whose power never fails, and whose wisdom and goodness never change, the prospect clears up on every side. A ray from the great source of light seems to illuminate the whole creation. Good men discover a parent and a friend. They attain a fortress in every danger; a refuge amidst all storms; *a dwelling place in all generations.* They are no longer *afraid of evil tidings. Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*

Though these reasonings, from the unchanging tenour of divine government, cannot but afford much comfort to good men, their satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit promises which are given them in the word of God. The immutability of the divine purpose assures them most perfectly of those promises being fulfilled in due time, how adverse soever circumstances may at present appear to their accomplishment. *The Strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Men have the command only of the present time. When that is suffered to pass, changes may befall, either in their own state, or in the situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best intentions in our behalf, and render all their promises fruitless. Hence, even setting aside the danger of human inconstancy, the confidence which we can repose on any earthly protector is extremely imperfect. Man, in his highest glory, is but a reed floating on the stream of time, and forced to follow every new direction of the cur-

rent. But God is *the rock of ages.* All time is equally in his hands. Intervening accidents cannot embarrass him; nor any unforeseen obstacle retard the performance of his most distant promise. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.* There is no vicissitude in the human state in which good men cannot take sanctuary with him as a sure and abiding friend; the safe conductor of their pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal rest of their souls hereafter. All their patrons may desert them, and all their friends may die; but *the Lord still lives, who is their rock; and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.* He hath promised that he *will not leave them when they are old, nor forsake them when their strength faileth;* and that even when *their hearts shall faint, and their flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever.* His immutability is not only the ground of trust in him during their own abode on earth, but gives them the satisfaction of looking forward to the same wise and good administration as continued to the end of time. When departing hence, and bidding adieu to life, with all its changeful scenes, they can with comfort and peace leave their family, their friends, and their dearest concerns, in the hands of that God who reigneth for ever, and whose *countenance shall always behold the upright* with the same complacency. *My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like the grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance to all generations. The children of thy servants shall continue; and their seed shall be established before thee.**

* Psalm cii. 11, 12. 28

SUCH are the benefits which good men may derive from meditating on God as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. It inspires them with sentiments of devout, humble, and grateful adoration. It points out to them the unvarying tenour of conduct which they ought to hold; checks their fickleness and inconstancy; and, amidst all distresses and fears, affords them comfort. The immutability of God is the surest basis on which their hopes can be built. It is indeed the pillar on which the whole universe rests. — On such serious and solemn meditations let our thoughts often dwell, in order to correct that folly and levity which are so apt to take possession of the human heart. And if our minds be overawed, and even depressed with so high a view of the divine nature, let them be relieved by the reflection, that to this unchangeable God we are permitted to look up, through a gracious Mediator, who, though possessed of divine perfection, is not unconscious of human distress and frailty.

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THE assertion in the text of Christ's being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities,* plainly implies that he had full experience both of the external distresses, and of the internal sorrows of human nature. Assuming a body such as ours, he subjected himself to all the natural consequences of corporeal frailty. He did not choose for himself an easy and opulent condition, in order to glide through the world with the least molestation. He did not suit his mission to the upper ranks of mankind chiefly, by assimilating

his state to theirs; but, born in meanness and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniencies of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations or the ingratitude of friends, in the scorn of the proud or the insults of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarized himself in it with a wide compass of human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raised him above the sensations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case, he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary, it appears, from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly gloried. He felt as a man, and he sympathised with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he was *troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation of his agony in the garden of Gethsemanè exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superiour to the objects of dismay which were then in

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posed to be most thoroughly learned; and hence in the laws of Moses, when the Israelites are commanded not to oppress the stranger, this reason is given, *for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt.** The distressed, accordingly, fly for consolation to those who have been their companions in woe. They decline the prosperous, and look up to them with a suspicious eye. They consider them as ignorant of their feelings, and therefore regardless of their complaints. Amidst the manifold sorrows of life, then, how soothing is the thought that our great Intercessor with God was a fellow-sufferer with ourselves, while he passed through this valley of tears.

But it was necessary for Christ, it may be said, to assume our nature in order to acquire the knowledge of its infirmity and distress. As a divine person, was he not perfectly acquainted with our frame before he descended to the earth? Did he stand in need of being prompted to compassion by the experience of our sorrows? Could his experimental knowledge of human weakness increase the benevolence of a nature which before was perfect? —— No: he submitted to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to be tempted like as we are;* not in order to become acquainted with our nature, but to satisfy us that he knew it perfectly; not in order to acquire any new degree of goodness, but to give us the firmer confidence in the goodness which he possessed, and to convey the sense of it to our hearts with greater force and effect.

Distrust is a weakness peculiarly incident to the miserable. They are apt to reject hope, to indulge

* Exod. xxiii. 9.

fear, and to tinge, with the dark colour of their own minds, every object which is offered for their encouragement. The representations given us of the Deity in Scripture, afford undoubtedly much ground for trust in his goodness. But the perfection of an Almighty Being, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, *whom no man hath seen or can see*, is overwhelming to a timid apprehension. The goodness which it promises is a new and unknown form of goodness. Whatever proceeds from a nature so far superiour to our own, is beheld with a degree of awe, which is ready to overpower hope. Upon this account, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Supreme Being is often described with the attributes of a man, in order to give a shade and softening to his greatness, and to accommodate his goodness more to our capacity. The relentings of a friend, the pity of a parent, and the sighs of a mourner, are ascribed to the Almighty. But we easily perceive such attributes to be no more than figures and allusions. The comfort which they afford is not definite nor precise. They leave the mind under an anxious uncertainty, lest it err in its interpretation of those allegories of mercy. In the person of Jesus Christ, the object of our trust is brought nearer to ourselves; and of course adapted more effectually to our encouragement. Those well-known tender affections, which are only figuratively ascribed to the Divinity, are in our great Mediator thoroughly realized. His goodness is the goodness of human nature exalted and rendered perfect. It is that species of goodness with which we are best acquainted, compassion to the unhappy; and compassion cultivated by that discipline which we know to be the most powerful, the experience of sorrows.

SERMON XX.

On the Compassion of Christ.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

Hebrews, iv. 15.

We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

WHEN we compare the counsels of Providence with the plans of men, we find a like difference obtain, as in the works of nature compared with those of art. The works of art may, at first view, appear the most finished and beautiful; but when the eye is assisted to pry into their contexture, the nicest workmanship is discerned to be rough and blemished. Whereas the works of nature gain by the most accurate examination; and those which on a superficial survey appear defective or rude, the more intimately they are inspected, discover the more exact construction and consummate beauty. In the same manner, the systems of worldly policy, though at first they seem plausible and profound, soon betray, in their progress, the narrowness of the human understanding; while those dispensations of Providence, which appeared to furnish objections either against the

goodness or the wisdom of Heaven, have, upon a more extensive view of their consequences, frequently afforded the most striking proofs of both.

God manifested in the flesh, was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.* It contradicted every prepossession which their confined ideas of religion and philosophy led them to entertain. If a superiour Being was to interpose for the restoration of a degenerate world, they concluded that he would certainly appear in celestial majesty. But *the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of men.* The divine wisdom saw it to be fit that the Saviour of mankind should *in all things be made like unto those* whom he came to save. By living as a man among men, he dispensed instruction in the most winning manner. He added to instruction the grace and the force of his own example. He accommodated that example to the most trying and difficult situations of human life; and, by suffering a painful death, he both taught men how to suffer and die; and, in that nature which had offended, he offered a solemn expiation to God for human guilt.

Besides these ends, so worthy of God, which were accomplished by the incarnation of Christ, another, of high importance, is suggested in the text. Human life is to good men, as well as to others, a state of suffering and distress. To supply them with proper consolation and encouragement during such a state, was one great purpose of the undertaking of Christ. With this view he assumed the office of their high priest, or mediator with God; and the encouragement which this office affords them, will be proportioned to their assured belief, first of his power, and next of his compassion. His power is set forth in

the verse preceding the text, and the proper argument is founded upon it. *Seeing that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* But though it be encouraging to know that our high priest is the *Son of God*, and that he is *passed into the heavens*, yet these facts alone are not sufficient to render him the full object of our confidence. For, as the apostle afterwards observes, it belongs to the character of a high priest *to be taken from among men, that he may have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, seeing that he himself is compassed with infirmity.* In order then to satisfy us of our high priest's possessing also the qualifications of mercy and compassion, we are told that he is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are.* The force of this consideration I purpose now to illustrate. I shall first explain the facts which are stated in the text, and then show how from these our Saviour's compassion is to be inferred, and in what manner it may be accommodated to the consolation and hope of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

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his state to theirs; but, born in meanness and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniencies of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations or the ingratitude of friends, in the scorn of the proud or the insults of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarized himself in it with a wide compass of human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raised him above the sensations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case, he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary, it appears, from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly gloried. He felt as a man, and he sympathised with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he was *troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation of his agony in the garden of Gethsemanè exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superiour to the objects of dismay which were then in

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standing all the infirmities incident to it, no man is under a necessity of being wicked. So far is our Saviour's experience of our nature from affording any ground of hope to presumptuous offenders, that it ought to fill them with terrour. For it shows them how thoroughly qualified he is to discriminate accurately the characters of men, and to mark the boundaries between frailty and perverseness. He who from his own feelings well knows all the workings of the human heart, clearly discerns how different their temper is from what was once his own. He perceives that vice, not virtue, is their choice; and that instead of resisting temptation, they resist conscience. He sees that infirmity affords them no excuse; and that the real cause of their acting a criminal part, is not because they cannot do better, but, in truth, because they will not. Having forfeited every title to compassion, they are left in the hands of justice; and according *as they have sown*, they must expect *to reap*.

But, in the next place, to such as are sincere and upright, the doctrine which I have illustrated affords high encouragement, and powerfully recommends the Christian religion. It places that religion in its proper point of view, as a medicinal plan, intended both for the recovery of mankind from guilt, and for their consolation under trouble. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* The Law was a dispensation of mere authority. The Gospel is a dispensation, not of authority only, but of relief. If it discovers new duties and imposes new obligations, it opens also sources of comfort which were before unknown to the world.

A Mediator between God and his creatures was an object after which men in all nations, and under all forms of religion, had long and anxiously sought. The follies of superstition have served to disclose to us, in this instance, the sentiments of nature. The whole religion of paganism was a system of mediation and intercession. Depressed by a conscious sense of guilt, nature shrunk at the thought of adventuring on a direct approach to the Sovereign of the universe; and laboured to find out some auspicious introductor to that awful presence. With blind and trembling eagerness the nations fled to subordinate deities, to tutelar gods, and to departed spirits, as their patrons and advocates above. Them they studied to sooth with such costly gifts, such pompous rites, or such humble supplications as they thought might incline them to favour their cause, and to support their interests with the Supreme Divinity. While mankind were bewildered in this darkness, the Gospel not only revealed the true Mediator, who in this view may be justly called *the desire of all nations*, but placed his character and office in a light most admirably fitted, as has been shown in this Discourse, to support the interest of virtue in the world, and to encourage the humble, without flattering the presumptuous. What plan of religion could be more suited to the circumstances of man, or more worthy of the goodness of his Creator? What more animating to the pious worshipper, in performing those solemn acts of devotion to which we are called by the service of this day?

I CANNOT conclude without taking notice how remarkably this dispensation of religion is calculated

to promote a spirit of humanity and compassion among men, by those very means which it employs for inspiring devotion towards God. We are now drawing nigh to the Supreme Being through a Mediator, for whose compassion we pray, on account of the experience which he has had of our frailty. We trust, that having been acquainted with distress, he *will not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted.* The argument by which we plead for his compassion, concludes still more strongly for mutual charity, and sympathy, with one another. He, who in the midst of the common sufferings of life, feels not for the distressed; he who relents not at his neighbour's grief, nor scans his failings with the eye of a brother, must be sensible that he excludes himself from the commiseration of Christ. He makes void the argument by which he pleads for his mercy; nay he establishes a precedent against himself. Thus, the Christian religion approves itself as worthy of God, by connecting devotion in strict union with charity. As in its precepts the love of God and the love of man are joined, so in its institution the exercise of both is called forth; and to worship God through the mediation of a compassionate High Priest, necessarily supposes in the worshippers a spirit of compassion towards their own brethren.

SERMON XXI.

On the Love of Praise.

JOHN, xii. 43.

For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

THE state of man on earth, is manifestly designed for the trial of his virtue. Temptations everywhere occur; and perpetual vigilance and attention are required. There is no passion or principle of action in his nature, which may not, if left to itself, betray him into some criminal excess. Corruption gains entrance, not only by those passions which are apparently of dangerous tendency, such as covetousness, and love of pleasure; but by means of those also which are seemingly the most fair and innocent, such as the desire of esteem and praise. Of this the text suggests a remarkable instance. When our Lord appeared in the land of Judea, the purity of his doctrine, and the evidence of his miracles, procured him a considerable number of followers, chiefly among the lower classes of men. But the Pharisees, who were the leading and fashionable sect, galled with the freedom of his reproofs, decried him as an impostor. Hence it came to pass, that though *some of the rulers believed in him, yet, because of the Pharisees, they did not*

confess him. Rulers, persons who, by their rank and education, ought to have been superiour to any popular prejudice, were so far overawed by the opinions of others, as to stifle their conviction, to dissemble their faith, and to join with the prevailing party, in condemning one whom in their hearts they revered: for which this reason is given, that *they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.* Since, then, the love of praise can mislead men into such culpable and dishonest conduct, let us, with some attention, examine the nature of this passion. Let us consider how far it is an allowable principle of action; when it begins to be criminal; and upon what accounts we ought to guard against its acquiring the entire ascendant.

We are intended by Providence to be connected with one another in society. Single unassisted individuals could make small advances towards any valuable improvement. By means of society our wants are supplied, and our lives rendered comfortable; our capacities are enlarged, and our virtuous affections called forth into proper exercise. In order to confirm our mutual connexion, it was necessary that some attracting power, which had the effect of drawing men together, and strengthening the social ties, should pervade the human system. Nothing could more happily fulfil this purpose, than our being so formed as to desire the esteem, and to delight in the good opinion, of each other. Had such a propensity been wanting, and selfish principles left to occupy its place, society must have proved an unharmonious and discordant state. Instead of mutual attraction, a repulsive power would have prevailed.

Among men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For the wisest ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast.

To a variety of good purposes it is subservient, and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of the useful enterprises of men. It has animated the patriot and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity, and fortitude are what all mankind admire. Hence, such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a ground on which exhortation, counsel, and reproof, can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion, betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach: and if that be extinguished, one of the principal guards of virtue is removed, and the path opened to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glowed with shame, and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honourable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of

action, the esteem of our fellow-creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every fair and honest undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness, depends in a great measure upon it. The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honour; while a respected character adds weight to example, and authority to counsel. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects, is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty; and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character.

But while the love of praise is admitted to be a natural, and, in so many respects, an useful principle of action, we are to observe, that it is entitled to no more than our secondary regard. It has its boundary set; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station. But when, passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, encroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty; the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts; and instead of

elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to other principles of action, is what renders it either innocent or criminal. The crime with which the Jewish rulers are charged in the text, was not that they loved the praise of men; but that they loved it *more than the praise of God.*

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honour, between the praise of men and the praise of God, the passion for applause may become criminal, by occupying the place of a better principle. When vain-glory usurps the throne of virtue; when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated; such actions, however specious, have no claim to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds, done merely *to be seen of men,* lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjuncture, which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be favourable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident, that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise, as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of men he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire, contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to show, by the

firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superiour to all opinion.—Let us now proceed to consider the arguments which should support such a spirit, and guard us against the improper influence of praise or censure in the course of our duty.

In the first place, the praise of men is not an object of such value in itself, as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character, when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such alone as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But, how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favour of the multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach? The laurels which human praise confers, are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them. Let the man who is vain of public favour, be humbled, by the reflection that, in the midst of his success, he is mingled with a crowd of impostors and deceivers, of hypocrites and enthusiasts, of ignorant pretenders and superficial

reasoners, who, by various arts, have attained as high a rank as himself in temporary fame.

We may easily be satisfied that applause will be often shared by the undeserving, if we allow ourselves to consider from whom it proceeds. When it is the approbation of the wise only, and the good, which is pursued, the love of praise may be then accounted to contain itself within just bounds, and to run in its proper channel. But the testimony of the discerning few, modest and unassuming as they commonly are, forms but a small part of the public voice. It seldom amounts to more than a whisper, which amidst the general clamour is drowned. When the love of praise has taken possession of the mind, it confines not itself to an object so limited. It grows into an appetite for indiscriminate praise. And who are they that confer this praise? A mixed multitude of men, who in their whole conduct are guided by humour and caprice, far more than by reason; who admire false appearances, and pursue false gods; who inquire superficially and judge rashly; whose sentiments are for the most part erroneous, always changeable and often inconsistent. Nor let any one imagine, that by looking above the crowd, and courting the praise of the fashionable and the great, he makes sure of true honour. There are a great vulgar, as well as a small. Rank often makes no difference in the understandings of men, or in their judicious distribution of praise. Luxury, pride, and vanity, have frequently as much influence in corrupting the sentiments of the great, as ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice, have in misleading the opinions of the crowd.—And is it to such judges as these that you submit the supreme direction of your

conduct? Do you stoop to court their favour as your chief distinction, when an object of so much juster and higher ambition is presented to you *in the praise of God?* God is the only unerring Judge of what is excellent. His approbation alone is the substance, all other praise is but the shadow of honour. The character which you bear in his sight, is your only real one. How contemptible does it render you, to be indifferent with respect to this, and to be solicitous about a name alone, a fictitious, imaginary character, which has no existence except in the opinions of a few weak and credulous men around you? They see no farther than the outside of things. They can judge of you by actions only; and not by the comprehensive view of all your actions, but by such merely as you have had opportunity of bringing forth to public notice. But the Sovereign of the world beholds you in every light in which you can be placed. The silent virtues of a generous purpose, and a pious heart, attract his notice, equally with the most splendid deeds. From him you may reap the praise of good actions which you had no opportunity of performing. For he sees them in their principle; he judges of you by your intentions; he knows what you would have done. You may be in his eyes a hero or a martyr, without undergoing the labours of the one or the sufferings of the other. His inspection, therefore, opens a much wider field for praise, than what the world can afford you; and for praise, too, certainly far more illustrious in the eye of reason. Every real artist studies to approve himself to such as are knowing in his art. To their judgment he appeals. On their approbation he rests his character, and not on the praise of the unskilled and rude. In

the highest art of all, that of life and conduct, shall the opinions of ignorant men come into the most distant competition with his approbation, who is the searcher of all hearts, and the standard of all perfection? — The testimony of his praise is not indeed as yet openly bestowed. But though the voice of the Almighty sound not in your ears, yet by conscience, his sacred vicegerent, it is capable of being conveyed to your heart. The softest whisper of divine approbation is sweeter to the soul of a virtuous man, than the loudest shouts of that tumultuary applause which proceeds from the world.

Consider, farther, how narrow and circumscribed in its limits that fame is, which the vain-glorious man so eagerly pursues. In order to show him this, I shall not bid him reflect that it is confined to a small district of the earth; and that when he looks a little beyond the region which he inhabits, he will find himself as much unknown as the most obscure person around him. I shall not desire him to consider, that in the gulph of oblivion, where all human memorials are swallowed up, his name and fame must soon be inevitably lost. He may imagine that ample honours remain to gratify ambition, though his reputation extend not over the whole globe, nor last till the end of time, but let him calmly reflect, that within the narrow boundaries of that country to which he belongs, and during that small portion of time which his life fills up, his reputation, great as he may fancy it to be, occupies no more than an inconsiderable corner. Let him think what multitudes of those among whom he dwells, are totally ignorant of his name and character: how many imagine themselves too important to regard him;

how many are too much occupied with their own wants and pursuits, to pay him the least attention; and where his reputation is in any degree spread, how often it has been attacked, and how many rivals are daily rising to abate it: Having attended to these circumstances he will find sufficient materials for humiliation in the midst of the highest applause. —— From all these considerations it clearly appears, that though the esteem of our fellow-creatures be pleasing, and the pursuit of it, in a moderate degree, be fair and lawful, yet that it affords no such object to desire, as entitles it to be a ruling principle.

In the second place, an excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view; and sets up a false light for its guide. Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair; and its garb and appearance are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, I before admitted, may give birth to actions which are both splendid and useful. At a distance, they strike the eye with uncommon brightness; but, on a nearer and stricter survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterises true virtue. Little passions and selfish interests entered into the motives of those who performed them. They were jealous of a competitor. They sought to humble a rival. They looked round for spectators to admire them. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take

their rise is hidden. Without, appears the hero; within is found the man of dust and clay. Consult such as have been intimately connected with the followers of renown; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing, except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

But, supposing the virtue of vain-glorious men not to be always false, it certainly cannot be depended upon as firm or sure. Constancy and steadiness are to be looked for from him only whose conduct is regulated by a sense of what is right; *whose praise is not of men, but of God;* whose motive to discharge his duty is always the same. Change, as much as you please, the situation of such a man; let applause or let censure be his lot; let the public voice, which this day has extolled him, to-morrow as loudly decry him; on the tenour of his behaviour these changes produce no effect. He moves in a higher sphere. As the sun in his orbit is not interrupted by the mists and storms of the atmosphere below; so, regardless of the opinions of men, *through honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report,* he pursues the path which conscience has marked out. Whereas the apparent virtues of that man whose eye is fixed on the world are precarious and temporary. Supported only by circumstances, occasions, and particular regards, they fluctuate and fall with these. Excited by public admiration, they disappear when it is withdrawn; like those exhalations which, raised by heat from the earth, glitter in the air with

momentary splendour, and then fall back to the ground from whence they sprung.

The intemperate love of praise not only weakens the true principles of probity, by substituting inferiour motives in their stead, but frequently also impels men to actions which are directly criminal. It obliges them to follow the current of popular opinion whithersoever it may carry them; and hence *shipwreck* is often made both *of faith and of a good conscience*. According as circumstances lead them to court the acclamations of the multitude, or to pursue the applause of the great, vices of different kinds will stain their character. In one situation, they will make hypocritical professions of religion. In another, they will be ashamed of their Redeemer, and of his words. They will be afraid to appear in their own form, or to utter their genuine sentiments. Their whole character will become fictitious, opinions will be assumed, speech and behaviour modelled, and even the countenance formed, as prevailing taste exacts. From one who has submitted to such prostitution for the sake of praise, you can no longer expect fidelity or attachment on any trying occason. In private life, he will be a timorous and treacherous friend. In public conduct, he will be supple and versatile; ready to desert the cause which he had espoused, and to veer with every shifting wind of popular favour. In fine, all becomes unsound and hollow in that heart, where, instead of regard to the divine approbation, there reigns the sovereign desire of pleasing men.

In the third place, this passion, when it becomes predominant, most commonly defeats its own end, and deprives men of the honour which they are so

eager to gain. Without preserving liberty and independence, we can never command respect. That servility of spirit which subjects us to the opinion of others, and renders us tributaries to the world for the sake of applause, is what all mankind despise. They look up with reverence to one who, unawed by their censures, acts according to his own sense of things, and follows the free impulse of an honourable mind. But him who hangs totally on their judgment, they consider as their vassal. They even enjoy a malignant pleasure in humbling his vanity, and withholding that praise which he is seen to court. By artifice and show, he may shine for a time in the public eye; but it is only as long as he can support the belief of acting from principle. When the inconsistencies into which he falls detect his character, his reputation passes away like the pageant of a day. No man ever obtained lasting fame, who did not, on several occasions, contradict the prejudices of popular opinion.

There is no course of behaviour which will at all times please all men. That which pleases most generally, and which only commands durable praise, is religion and virtue. Sincere piety towards God, kind affection to men, and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of life; a conscience pure and undefiled; a heart firm to justice and to truth, seperiour to all terrours that would shake, and insensible of all pleasures that would betray it; unconquerable by the opposition of the world, and resigned to God alone: these are the qualities which render a man truly respectable and great. Such a character may, in evil times, incur unjust reproach. But the clouds which envy or prejudice has gathered around it, will gradually disperse; and its brightness will come

forth, in the end, as the noon day. As soon as it is thoroughly known, it finds a witness in every breast. It forces approbation, even from the most degenerate. The human heart is so formed as to be attuned, if we may use the expression, to its praise. In fact, it is this firm and inflexible virtue, this determined regard to principle beyond all opinion, which has crowned the characters of such as now stand highest in the rolls of lasting fame. The truly illustrious are they who did not court the praise of the world, but who performed the actions which deserve it. They were perhaps traduced in their life-time, by those whom they opposed. But posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the men whom the voice of ages now concurs in celebrating. *The memorial of virtue is immortal; because it is approved of God and of men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory; striving for undefiled rewards.**

In the fourth place, as an immoderate passion for human praise is dangerous to virtue, and unfavourable to true honour; so it is destructive of self-enjoyment and inward peace. Regard to the praise of God prescribes a simple and consistent tenour of conduct, which in all situations is the same; which engages us in no perplexities, and requires no artful refinement. *Walking uprightly, we walk surely,* because we tread an even and open path. But he who turns aside from the straight road of duty, in order to gain applause, involves himself in an intricate labyrinth.

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1, 2.

He will be often embarrassed concerning the course which he ought to hold. His mind will be always on the stretch. He will be obliged to listen with anxious attention to every whisper of the popular voice. The demands of those masters whom he has submitted to serve, will prove frequently contradictory and inconsistent. He has prepared a yoke for his neck, which he must resolve to bear, how much soever it may gall him.

The toils of virtue are honourable. The mind is supported under them by the consciousness of acting a right and becoming part. But the labours to which he is doomed who is enslaved to the desire of praise, are aggravated by reflection both on the uncertainty of the recompence which he pursues, and on the debasement to which he submits. Conscience will, from time to time, remind him of the improper sacrifices which he has made, and of the forfeiture which he has incurred, of the praise of God for the sake of praise from men. Suppose him to receive all the rewards which the mistaken opinion of the world can bestow, its loudest applause will often be unable to drown the upbraidings of an inward voice; and if a man is reduced to be ashamed of himself, what avails it him to be caressed by others?

But, in truth, the reward towards which he looks who proposes human praise as his ultimate object, will be always flying like a shadow before him. So capricious and uncertain, so fickle and mutable, is the favour of the multitude, that it proves the most unsatisfactory of all pursuits in which men can be engaged. He who sets his heart on it, is preparing for himself perpetual mortifications. If the greatest and best can seldom retain it long, we may easily

believe that from the vain and undeserving it will suddenly escape. There is no character but what on some side is vulnerable by censure. He who lifts himself up to the observation and notice of the world, is, of all men, the least likely to avoid it. For he draws upon himself a thousand eyes, that will narrowly inspect him in every part. Every opportunity will be watched, of bringing him down to the common level. His errours will be more divulged, and his infirmities more magnified, than those of others. In proportion to his eagerness for praise, will be his sensibility to reproach. Nor is it reproach alone that will wound him. He will be as much dejected by silence and neglect. He puts himself under the power of every one to humble him, by withholding expected praise. Even when praise is bestowed, he is mortified by its being either faint or trite. He pines when his reputation stagnates. The degree of applause to which he has been accustomed, grows insipid; and to be always praised from the same topics, becomes at last much the same with not being praised at all.

All these chagrins and disquietudes are happily avoided by him who keeps so troublesome a passion within its due bounds; who is more desirous of being truly worthy, than of being thought so; who pursues the praise of the world with manly temperance, and in subordination to the praise of God. He is neither made giddy by the intoxicating vapour of applause, nor humbled and cast down by the unmerited attacks of censure. Resting on a higher approbation, he enjoys himself, in peace, whether human praise stays with him, or flies away. *With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's*

judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord. My witness is in heaven; and my record is on high.

In the fifth and last place, the advantages which redound from the praise of men, are not such as can bear to be put in competition with those which flow from the praise of God. The former are necessarily confined within the verge of our present existence. The latter follow us beyond the grave, and extend through all eternity. Not only is the praise of men limited in its effects to this life, but also to particular situations of it. In the days of health and ease, it may brighten the sunshine of prosperity. It may then sooth the ear with pleasing accents, and gratify the imagination with fancied triumphs. But when the distressful seasons of life arrive, it will be found altogether hollow and unsubstantial: And surely, the value of any possession is to be chiefly estimated by the relief which it can bring us, in the time of our greatest need. When the mind is cast down with sorrow and grief, when sickness spreads its gloom around us, or death rises in awful prospect to our view, the opinions and the discourses of the world will appear trifling and insignificant. To one who is occupied with nearer and more affecting interests, the praise or the censure of the world will seem like the noise of distant voices, in which he has small concern. But then is the season when the praise of God supports and upholds the labouring soul. Brought home to the heart by the testimony of a good conscience, and by *the divine Spirit bearing witness with our spirits*, it inspires fortitude, and produces *a peace which passeth understanding*.

At present, we behold an irregular and disordered state of things. Virtue is often deprived of its proper honours, and vice usurps them in its stead. The characters of men are mistaken; and ignorance and folly dispose of human applause. But the day hastens apace, which shall close this scene of errours, and vindicate the rights of justice and truth. *Then shall be rendered to every man according to his works.* Envy shall no longer have the power of obscuring merit, nor popular prejudices be able to support the undeserving. Hidden worth shall be brought to light, and secret crimes revealed. Many who passed through the world in the silent obscurity of humble but steady goodness, shall be distinguished as the favourites of Heaven; while the proud, the ambitious, and the vain, are left to everlasting dishonour. The Great Judge hath declared, that *whosoever hath been ashamed of him and of his words, of that man shall he be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels.* Every departure from duty shall, at the period of final retribution, terminate in ignominy. True honour and true virtue shall be seen to coincide; and when all human fame has passed away like smoke, the only praise which shall be for ever remembered is that divine testimony, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

THESE arguments clearly show the importance of preserving the love of praise under proper subordination to the principle of duty. In itself, it is an useful motive to action; but when allowed to extend its influence too far, it corrupts the whole character, and produces guilt, disgrace, and misery. To be

entirely destitute of it, is a defect. To be governed by it, is depravity. The proper adjustment of the several principles of action in human nature, is a matter that deserves our highest attention. For when any one of them becomes either too weak or too strong, it endangers both our virtue and our happiness. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence;* pray that God would enable thee to keep it with success; *for out of the heart are the issues of life.*

SERMON XXII.

On the Proper Estimate of Human Life.

Ecclesiastes, xii. 8.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.

NO serious maxim has been more generally adopted, than that of the text. In every age the vanity of human life has been the theme of declamation, and the subject of complaint. It is a conclusion in which men of all characters and ranks, the high and the low, the young and the old, the religious and the worldly, have more frequently concurred, than in any other. But how just soever the conclusion may be, the premises which lead to it are often false. For it is prompted by various motives, and derived from very different views of things. Sometimes the language of the text is assumed by a sceptic, who cavils at Providence, and censures the constitution of the world. Sometimes it is the complaint of a peevish man, who is discontented with his station, and ruffled by the disappointment of unreasonable hopes. Sometimes it is the style of the licentious, when groaning under miseries in which their vices have involved them. Invectives against the vanity of the world which come from any of these quarters deserve no regard; as they are the dictates of impiety, of spleen, or of folly. The only

case in which the sentiment of the text claims our attention is, when uttered, not as an aspersion on Providence, or a reflection on human affairs in general; not as the language of private discontent, or the result of guilty sufferings; but as the sober conclusion of a wise and good man, concerning the imperfection of that happiness which rests solely on worldly pleasures. These, in their fairest form, are not what they seem to be. They never bestow that complete satisfaction which they promise; and therefore he who looks to nothing beyond them, shall have frequent cause to deplore their vanity.

Nothing is of higher importance to us, as men and as Christians, than to form a proper estimate of human life, without either loading it with imaginary evils, or expecting from it greater advantages than it is able to yield. It shall be my business, therefore, in this Discourse, to distinguish a just and religious sense of the vanity of the world, from the unreasonable complaints of it which we often hear. I shall endeavour, I. To show in what sense it is true that all earthly pleasures are vanity. II. To inquire how this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its great Author. III. To examine whether there are not some real and solid enjoyments in human life, which fall not under this general charge of vanity. And, IV. To point out the proper improvement to be made of such a state as the life of man shall appear on the whole to be.

I. I AM to show, in what sense it is true that all human pleasures are vanity. This is a topic which might be embellished with the pomp of much de-

scription. But I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life, which every impartial observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession.

First, Disappointment in pursuit. When we look around us on the world, we every where behold a busy multitude, intent on the prosecution of various designs which their wants or desires have suggested. We behold them employing every method which ingenuity can devise, some the patience of industry, some the boldness of enterprise, others the dexterity of stratagem, in order to compass their ends. Of this incessant stir and activity what is the fruit? In comparison of the crowd who have toiled in vain, how small is the number of the successful! Or rather, where is the man who will declare, that in every point he has completed his plan, and attained his utmost wish? No extent of human abilities has been able to discover a path, which, in any line of life, leads unerringly to success. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding.* We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against dangers on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across, which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust.

Were such disappointments confined to those who aspire at engrossing the higher departments of life, the misfortune would be less. The humiliation of the mighty, and the fall of ambition from its towering height, little concern the bulk of mankind. These are objects on which, as on distant meteors, they gaze from afar, without drawing personal instruction from

events so much above them. But, alas! when we descend into the regions of private life, we find disappointment and blasted hope equally prevalent there. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the justice of our pretensions, can ensure success. But *time and chance happen to all.* Against the stream of events, both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently overborne alike by the current.

Besides disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a farther vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications; after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Some may be so fortunate as to attain what they have pursued; but none are rendered completely happy by what they have attained. Disappointed hope is misery; and yet successful hope is only imperfect bliss. Look through all the ranks of mankind. Examine the condition of those who appear most prosperous; and you will find that they are never just what they desire to be. If retired, they languish for action; if busy, they complain of fatigue. If in middle life, they are impatient for distinction; if in high stations, they sigh after freedom and ease. Something is still wanting to that plenitude of satisfaction which they expected to acquire. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart, as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoy-

ment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful.

This dissatisfaction, in the midst of human pleasure, springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancy paints them at a distance with splendid colours; but possession unveils the fallacy. The eagerness of passion bestows upon them at first a brisk and lively relish. But it is their fate always to pall by familiarity, and sometimes to pass from satiety into disgust. Happy would the poor man think himself if he could enter on all the treasures of the rich; and happy for a short while he might be; but before he had long contemplated and admired his state, his possessions would seem to lessen, and his cares would grow.

Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures, the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. To human lips it is not given to taste the cup of pure joy. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man groans in private under his own burden. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress, either felt or feared, gnaws like a worm the root of his felicity. When there is nothing from without to disturb the prosperous, a secret poison operates within. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. It fosters the loose and the violent passions. It engenders noxious habits; and taints the mind with a false delicacy, which makes it feel a thousand unreal evils.

But put the case in the most favourable light. Lay aside from human pleasures both disappointment in pursuit, and deceitfulness in enjoyment; suppose them to be fully attainable, and completely satisfactory; still there remains to be considered the vanity of uncertain possession and short duration. Were there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such, that every thing wavers and totters around us. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if, during its course, thou hearest not of somewhat to disquiet or alarm thee. For life never proceeds long in an uniform train. It is continually varied by unexpected events. The seeds of alteration are every where sown; and the sunshine of prosperity commonly accelerates their growth. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. By slow degrees prosperity rises; but rapid is the progress of evil. It requires no preparation to bring it forward. The edifice which it cost much time and labour to erect, one inauspicious event, one sudden blow, can level with the dust. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can delight us long. What amused our youth, loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. The silent lapse of time is ever carrying somewhat from us, till at length the period comes when all must be swept away. The prospect

of this termination of our labours and pursuits is sufficient to mark our state with vanity. *Our days are a hand-breadth, and our age is as nothing.* Within that little space is all our enterprise bounded. We crowd it with toils and care, with contention and strife. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion.

Thus much let it suffice to have said concerning the vanity of the world. That too much has not been said, must appear to every one who considers how generally mankind lean to the opposite side; and how often, by undue attachment to the present state, they both feed the most sinful passions, and *pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* Let us proceed to inquire,

II. How this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its divine Author. This inquiry involves that great difficulty which has perplexed the thoughtful and serious in every age. If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? In answer to this interesting question, let us observe,

In the first place, that the present condition of man was not his original or primary state. We are informed by divine revelation, that it is the consequence of his voluntary apostacy from God and a state of innocence. By this his nature was corrupted; his powers were enfeebled; and vanity and vexation introduced into his life. All nature became involved in the condemnation of man. The earth was cursed upon his account, and the whole creation made to *groan and travail in pain.*

How mysterious soever the account of this fall

may appear to us, many circumstances concur to authenticate the fact, and to show that human nature and the human state have undergone an unhappy change. The belief of this has obtained in almost all nations and religions. It can be traced through all the fables of antiquity. An obscure tradition appears to have pervaded the whole earth, that man is not now what he was at first; but that in consequence of some transgression against his great Lord, a state of degradation and exile succeeded to a condition that was more flourishing and happy. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us every-where the traces of some violent change which it has suffered. Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure, either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that was once more fair and magnificent. Let us observe,

In the second place, that as this was not the original, so it is not intended to be the final, state of man. Though, in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into this region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that they should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of his subjects, by the merciful undertaking of that great Restorer of the

world, our Lord Jesus Christ. By him *life and immortality were* both purchased and *brought to light. The new heavens and the new earth* are discovered, *wherein dwelleth righteousness;* where, through the divine grace, human nature shall regain its original honours, and man shall return to be what once he was in Paradise. Through those high discoveries of the Gospel, this life appears to good men only in the light of an intermediate and preparatory state. Its vanity and misery, in a manner, disappear. They have every reason to submit, without complaint, to its laws, and to wait in patience till the appointed time come for *the restitution of all things.* Let us take notice,

In the third place, That a future state being made known, we can account, in a satisfying manner, for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of divine goodness. The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Through the blessing of Heaven good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin, is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions and preparing us for felicity. There is much reason to believe that creatures as imperfect as we are require some such preliminary state of experience before they can recover the perfection of their nature. It is in the midst of disappointments and trials that we learn the insufficiency of temporal things to happiness, and are taught to seek it from God and Virtue. By these the violence of our passions is tamed, and our minds are formed to sobriety and reflection. In the varieties of life occasioned by the vicissitude of worldly fortune, we

are inured to habits both of the active and the suffering virtues. How much soever we complain of the vanity of the world, facts plainly show, that if its vanity were less, it could not answer the purpose of salutary discipline. Unsatisfactory as it is, its pleasures are still too apt to corrupt our hearts. How fatal then must the consequences have been, had it yielded us more complete enjoyment! If, with all its troubles, we are in danger of being too much attached to it, how entirely would it have seduced our affections, if no troubles had been mingled with its pleasures!

These observations serve in a great measure to obviate the difficulties which arise from the apparent vanity of the human state, by showing how, upon the Christian system, that vanity may be reconciled with the infinite goodness of the Sovereign of the universe. The present condition of man is not that for which he was originally designed; it is not to be his final state; and during his passage through the world, the distresses which he undergoes are rendered medicinal and improving. After having taken this view of things, the cloud, which in the preceding part of the discourse appeared to sit so thick upon human life, begins to be dissipated. We now perceive that man is not abandoned by his Creator. We discern great and good designs going on in his behalf. We are allowed to entertain better hopes; and are encouraged to inquire, as was proposed for the

IIId HEAD of discourse, Whether there be not, in the present condition of human life, some real and solid enjoyments which come not under the general charge of *vanity of vanities*. The doctrine of the

text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Them Solomon means to teach, that all expectations of bliss, which rest solely on earthly possessions and pleasures, shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert, that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For, besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the divine administration, it would directly contradict what he elsewhere asserts, that while *God giveth sore travail to the sinner, he giveth to the man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.** It may, it must indeed, be admitted, that unmixed and complete happiness is unknown on earth. No regulation of conduct can altogether prevent passions from disturbing our peace, and misfortunes from wounding our heart. But after this concession is made, will it follow that there is no object on earth which deserves our pursuit, or that all enjoyment becomes contemptible, which is not perfect? Let us survey our state with an impartial eye, and be just to the various gifts of Heaven. How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an approving conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity; they possess a happiness which,

* Eccles. ii. 26.

descending from a purer and more perfect region than this world, partakes not of its vanity.

Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state, which, though of an inferiour order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. It is necessary to call attention to these, in order to check that repining and unthankful spirit to which man is always too prone. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love. These comforts are often held in too low estimation, merely because they are ordinary and common; although that be the circumstance which ought, in reason, to enhance their value. They lie open, in some degree, to all; extend through every rank of life, and fill up agreeably many of those spaces in our present existence which are not occupied with higher objects, or with serious cares.

We are in several respects unjust to Providence in the computation of our pleasures and our pains. We number the hours which are spent in distress or sorrow; but we forget those which have passed away, if not in high enjoyment, yet in the midst of those gentle satisfactions and placid emotions which make life glide smoothly along. We complain of the frequent disappointments which we suffer in our pursuits. But we recollect not, that it is in pursuit, more than in attainment, that our pleasure now con-

sists. In the present state of human nature, man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts, than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he strives to gain. The solace of the mind, under all its labours, is hope; and there are few situations which entirely exclude it. Forms of expected bliss are often gleaming upon us through a cloud, to revive and exhilarate the most distressed. If pains be scattered through all the conditions of life, so also are pleasures. Happiness, as far as life affords it, can be engrossed by no rank of men to the exclusion of the rest; on the contrary, it is often found where, at first view, it would have been least expected. When the human condition appears most depressed, the feelings of men, through the gracious appointment of Providence, adjust themselves wonderfully to their state, and enable them to extract satisfaction from sources that are totally unknown to others. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention:

The first is, that many of the evils which occasion our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. They derive their existence from fancy and humour, and childish subjection to the opinion of others. The distress which they produce, I admit, is real;

but its reality arises not from the nature of things, but from that disorder of imagination which a small measure of reflection might rectify. In proof of this, we may observe that the persons who live most simply, and follow the dictates of plain unadulterated nature, are most exempted from this class of evils. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves. Life cannot but prove vain to them who affect a disrelish of every pleasure that is not both exquisite and new; who measure enjoyment not by their own feelings, but by the standard of fashion; who think themselves miserable if others do not admire their state. It is not from wants or sorrows that their complaints arise; but, though it may appear a paradox, from too much freedom from sorrow and want; from the languor of vacant life, and the irritation occasioned by those stagnating humours which ease and indulgence have bred within them. In their case, therefore, it is not the vanity of the world, but the vanity of their minds, which is to be accused. Fancy has raised up the spectres which haunt them. Fancy has formed the cloud which hangs over their life. Did they allow the light of reason to break forth, the spectres would vanish, and the cloud be dispelled.

The second observation on this head is that, of those evils which may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty,

disappointment and shame, are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice. Intemperance engenders disease, sloth produces poverty, pride creates disappointments, and dishonesty exposes to shame. The ungoverned passions of men betray them into a thousand follies; their follies into crimes; and their crimes into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery, to make loud complaints of the hard fate of man, and to take revenge upon the human condition by arraigning its supposed vanity. *The foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

I do not, however, maintain, that it is within our power to be altogether free of those self-procured evils. For perfection of any kind is beyond the reach of man. Where is the wisdom that never errs? where the just man that offendeth not? Nevertheless, much is here left to ourselves; and, imperfect as we are, the consequences of right or of wrong conduct make a wide difference in the happiness of men. Experience every day shows, that a sound, a well-governed, and virtuous mind, contributes greatly to smooth the path of life; and that *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. But the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his ways; and he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.* The tendency of the one is towards a plain and safe region. The course of the other leads him amidst snares and precipices. The one occasionally may, the other unavoidably

must, incur much trouble. Let us not then confound, under one general charge, those evils of the world which belong to the lot of humanity, and those which, through divine assistance, a wise and good man may, in a great measure, escape.

The third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle which acts under such circumstances, as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and by its prospects and promises, darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life. If it cannot secure the virtuous from disappointment in their pursuits, it forms them to such a temper as renders their disappointments more light and easy than those of other men. If it does not banish dissatisfaction from their worldly pleasures, it confers spiritual pleasures in their stead. If it ensures them not the possession of what they love, it furnishes comfort under the loss. As far as it establishes a contented frame of mind, it supplies the want of all that worldly men covet to possess. Compare the behaviour of the sensual and corrupted with that of the upright and holy, when both are feeling the effects of human vanity, and the difference of their situation will be manifest. Among the former, you are likely to find a querulous and dejected, among the latter, a composed and manly spirit. The lamentations of the one excite a mix-

ture of pity and contempt; while the dignity which the other maintains in distress, commands respect. The sufferings of the former settle into a peevish and fretful disposition; those of the latter soften the temper, and improve the heart. These consequences extend so far as to give ground for asserting that, a good man enjoys more happiness in the course of a seemingly unprosperous life, than a bad man does in the midst of affluence and luxury. What a conspicuous proof of this is afforded by the Apostle Paul, who from the very depth of affliction could send forth such a triumphant voice as proclaims the complete victory which he had gained over the evils of life! *Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: For, though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day.** Such, though perhaps in an inferiour degree, will be the influence of a genuine religious principle upon all true Christians. It begins to perform that office to them here, which hereafter it will more completely discharge, of *wiping away the tears from their eyes.*

Such, upon the whole, is the estimate which we are to form of human life. Much vanity will always belong to it; though the degree of its vanity will depend, in a great measure, on our own character and conduct. To the vicious, it presents nothing but a continued scene of disappointment and dissatisfaction. To the good, it is a mixed state of things; where many real comforts may be enjoyed;

* 2 Corinth. iv. 8, 9. 16.

where many resources under trouble may be obtained; but where trouble, in one form or other, is to be expected as the lot of man. From this view of human life,

The first practical conclusion which we are to draw is, that it highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Let us always remember where we are; from what causes the human state has become subject to depression; and upon what account it must remain under its present law. Such is the infatuation of self-love, that though in the general doctrine of the vanity of the world all men agree, yet almost every one flatters himself that his own case is to be an exception from the common rule. He rests on expectations which he thinks cannot fail him; and though the present be not altogether according to his wish, yet with the confidence of certain hope he anticipates futurity. Hence the anguish of disappointment fills the world; and evils, which are of themselves sufficiently severe, oppress with double force the unprepared and unsuspecting mind. Nothing therefore is of greater consequence to our peace, than to have always before our eyes such views of the world as shall prevent our expecting more from it than it is destined to afford. We destroy our joys by devouring them before-hand with too eager expectation. We ruin the happiness of life when we attempt to raise it too high. A tolerable and comfortable state is all that we can propose to ourselves on earth. Peace and contentment, not bliss nor transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for heaven.

But while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us, in the second place, guard against the other extreme, of repining and discontent. Enough has been already said to show, that, notwithstanding the vanity of the world, a considerable degree of comfort is attainable in the present state. Let the recollection of this serve to reconcile us to our condition, and to check the arrogance of complaints and murmurs. — What art thou, O son of man; who having sprung but yesterday out of the dust, darest to lift up thy voice against thy Maker, and to arraign his Providence, because all things are not ordered according to thy wish? What title hast thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what thy virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim? Is it nothing to thee to have been introduced into this magnificent world; to have been admitted as a spectator of the divine wisdom and works; and to have had access to all the comforts which Nature, with a bountiful hand, has poured forth round thee? Are all the hours forgotten which thou hast passed in ease, in complacency, or joy? Is it a small favour in thy eyes, that the hand of divine mercy has been stretched forth to aid thee, and, if thou reject not its proffered assistance, is ready to conduct thee into a happier state of existence? When thou comparest thy condition with thy desert, blush, and be ashamed of thy complaints. Be silent, be grateful and adore. Receive with thankfulness the blessings which are allowed thee. Revere that government which at present refuses thee more. Rest in this conclusion, that though there be evils in the world, its Creator is wise and good, and has been bountiful to thee.

In the third place, the view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. There are two great lines of conduct which offer themselves to our choice. The one leads towards the goods of the mind; the other towards those of fortune. The former, which is adopted only by the few, engages us chiefly in forming our principles, regulating our dispositions, improving all our inward powers. The latter, which in every age has been followed by the multitude, points at no other end but attaining the conveniences and pleasures of external life. It is obvious, that, in this last pursuit, the vanity of the world will encounter us at every step. For this is the region in which it reigns, and where it chiefly displays its power. At the same time, to lay the world totally out of view, is a vain attempt. The numberless ties by which we are connected with external things, put it out of our power to behold them with indifference. But though we cannot wrap ourselves up entirely in the care of the mind, yet the more we make its welfare our chief object, the nearer shall we approach to that happy independence on the world, which places us beyond the reach of suffering from its vanity.

That discipline, therefore, which corrects the eagerness of worldly passions, which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which enlightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity, than all the provision which we can make of the goods of fortune. To this let us bend our chief attention. Let us *keep the heart with all diligence, seeing out of it are the issues*

of life. Let us account our minds the most important province which is committed to our care; and if we cannot rule fortune, study at least to rule ourselves. Let us propose for our object, not worldly success, which it depends not on us to obtain; but that upright and honourable discharge of our duty, in every conjuncture, which, through the divine assistance, is always within our power. Let our happiness be sought where our proper praise is found; and that be accounted our only real evil, which is the evil of our nature; not that which is either the appointment of Providence, or which arises from the evil of others.

But, in order to carry on with success this rational and manly plan of conduct, it is necessary, in the last place, that to moral we join religious discipline. Under the present imperfection of our minds, and amidst the frequent shocks which we receive from human evils, much do we stand in need of every assistance for supporting our constancy. Of all assistance to which we can have recourse, none is so powerful as what may be derived from the principles of the Christian faith. He who builds on any other foundation, will find in the day of trial that he had built his house on the sand. Man is formed by his nature to look up to a superiour being, and to lean upon a strength that is greater than his own. All the considerations which we can offer for confirming his mind, presuppose this resource, and derive from it their principal efficacy.

Never then let us lose sight of those great objects which religion brings under our view, if we hope to stand firm and erect amidst the dangers and distresses

of our present state. Let us cultivate all that connection with the great Father of Spirits which our condition admits; by piety and prayer; by dependence on his aid, and trust in his promises; by a devout sense of his presence, and a continual endeavour to acquire his grace and favour. Let us, with humble faith and reverence, commit ourselves to the blessed Redeemer of the world; encouraged by the discoveries which he has made to us of the divine mercy, and by the hopes which he has afforded us of being raised to a nobler and happier station in the kingdom of God. So shall virtue, grounded upon piety, attain its full strength. Inspired with a religious spirit, and guided by rational principles, we shall be enabled to hold a steady course through this mixed region of pleasure and pain, of hope and fear; until the period arrive when that cloud which the present vanity of the world throws over human affairs, shall entirely disappear, and eternal light be diffused over all the works and ways of God.

SERMON XXIII.

On Death.

Psalm xxiii. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THIS Psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of Heaven. He looks around him on his state, and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his *shepherd, who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters.* When he considers the present, he beholds his divine Benefactor *preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making his cup run over.* When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to *follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the Psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity, he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through *the val-*

ley of the shadow of death. The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his almighty Guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;* and pursuing the allusion with which he had begun, exults in the hope that the shepherd who had hitherto conducted him, would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, and with his rod, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre which appals others, carries no terrour to them. While worldly men are justly said *through fear of death to be all their life-time subject to bondage*, to the righteous only it belongs to look on death and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself, and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenour of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate; and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation, by reflecting on the superiour advantages which, as Christians, we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, beyond

that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendour.

Death may be considered in three views: as the separation of the soul from the body; as the conclusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejecting. In the third, it is awful and alarming. One of the first enquiries which occurs concerning it is, for what purposes it was clothed with all these terrours? Why, under the government of a gracious Being, the termination of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as a punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are ever exercised by God, and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that all the formidable circumstances which attend death are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrours of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual that desire of self-preservation, which is Nature's first law. They reconcile him to bear the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses by

which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects beneficial to the individual, they are, at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world. The sword of authority were lifted up in vain. The sanctions of law would lose their effect. The scaffold and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample unrestrained on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource of government, were of no influence to deter offenders!

For such important ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrours to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is, upon enquiry, found to confirm it. But though for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet, like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendant as to debase their character, and to defeat the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward; and to surmount it in such a degree, that it shall not, even in near prospect,

deject our spirit, or trouble our peace is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it as its chief object; and professed that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of Religion, hearken for a little to what Reason has suggested on this subject. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable; and though the armour which she offers be not completely of proof, it may serve, however, to turn aside, or to blunt, some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

After this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate. —— Children of men! it is well known to you, that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature, the tribute of your being, the debt which all are bound to pay. On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up when Providence calls you to make room for others, who, in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He who is unwilling to submit to death when heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer, when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must; and is it not much better to

follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you are mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires have their period set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into dust. Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All who have gone before you have submitted to the stroke of death. All who are to come after you, shall undergo the same fate. The great and the good, the prince and the peasant, the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands throughout the world, shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity, which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth; which is an event as much according to the course of nature as it is that leaves should fall in autumn, or that fruit should drop from the tree when it is fully ripe?

The pain of death cannot be very long, and is probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of imagination that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in our nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of death. Honour has defied death; love has despised it; shame has rushed upon it; revenge has

disregarded it; grief a thousand times has wished for its approach. Is it not strange that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds, so many passions have conquered? What inconsistency is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being at the same time so afraid of what is to terminate them all! Who can tell whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows? You lament that you are to die; but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment of Heaven. Perform your duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you; and rejoice that a period is fixed for your dismission from the present warfare. Remember that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

Such discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate reflecting mind. But it is to be suspected that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm

and at ease; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives, which places the anxious trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings drawn from necessity and propriety, will be of small avail to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope; you must promise it protection; you must offer somewhat on which it can lay hold for support amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence, the great importance of those discoveries which revelation has made, and of those principles with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superiour efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

It may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence; the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action in which we have been engaged with pleasure, even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold, seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day; to every pursuit which had occupied our attention as citizens of the world; and to every friend and relation who had attached our hearts! How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall return to others, but no more to them; and that, while

their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark lonesome mansion, forgotten and cut off from among men, as though they never had been! *I said, in the cutting off my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years. I shall not see the Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.* *

Let us now observe, that the dejection in which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us when they are gone. He who is taking farewell of a country through which he had travelled with satisfaction, and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort, will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference which, at the hour of death takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas the culture of religion had previously formed the mind of a Christian for a calm and easy transition from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had set higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste of enjoyment, than what the common round of worldly

* Isaiah, xxxviii. 10, 11.

amusements could gratify. It gave him connections and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution and undisturbed heart. What though death interrupt him in the middle of his designs, and break off the plans which he had formed, of being useful to his family and the world? All these he leaves with tranquillity in the hands of that Providence to which he has ever been accustomed to look up with resignation; which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed; and which he knows will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice; but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by Him who cannot err. *Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.* * When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought that he is bidding them only a temporary not an eternal farewell. He commends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God, whom he has

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 8, 9.

served; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice which sooths his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me.* *

But death is more than the conclusion of human life. It is the gate, which at the same time that it closes on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terrour to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bourn no traveller ever returned to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception which suggests itself is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its Judge. The strict inquisition which it must undergo, the impartial doom which it must hear pronounced, and the unalterable state to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread; with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree, a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflection on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear as to strike him with no remorse? Whose righteousness is so unblemished as to abide the scrutiny of the great

* Jerem. xlix. 11.

searcher of hearts? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon his perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life?

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death, by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial; slight excuses satisfy their minds, and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their own reflections on past conduct with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrours of an invisible region; the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errours and frailties. The trembling mind casts every where around an anxious exploring eye after any power that can uphold, any mercy that will shield and save it. And accordingly we see how eagerly every device has been embraced, which superstition could invent in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which Christianity has made concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty, not as a creator only and a judge, but as a compassionate parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pitieth his children; and with whom there is forgiveness*, that he may be loved as well as feared. These general views, however, of the divine administration, would

not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. Two such facts the Gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement, and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to man than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes; and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of Heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations, which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind in giving ease to the heart. It shows us the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governour of the world, as merciful to the guilty in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible sovereign is an awful idea; almighty, unknown power, is always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an intercessor with that sovereign revealed. This intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature; who not only knows, but who experienced our frailty; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death* which is now opening on us; to whose powerful mediation with his

Father, we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit. — Such is the provision which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement, and the intercession of Christ, are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means, the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud which hung over the invisible world begins to be dispersed; and hope brightens through the gloom.

But what completes the triumph of good men over death, is the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object after which all nations have sighed, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this, the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind, bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and a prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of the living God.* Not only has it informed us that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the righteous, but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances which render that state sensible to our imagination, and en.

couraging to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave as *the first-fruits of them that sleep;* and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.* *

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who died in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them cheer their minds. Even in the valley of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be re-united to many of their ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, and tongues and people, who stand before the throne of God.* They leave behind the dregs of their nature; and

* John, xi. 25. — xx. 17.

exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glorious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed, surely, are the dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead* in this fruition, *resting from their labours, and followed by their works.* Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet, they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile: Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world they are divided from one another, and mingled with the worthless and vile; Death unites in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the universe they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High.* * — *O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?* Where are the terrours with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations? Where are thy dreary and desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, thy visionary horrours have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and, instead of the *habitations of dragons*, appears the paradise of God.

But supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state, to be overcome, there is still one circumstance which renders death formidable to many; that is, the shock which nature is apprehending to sustain at the

* Wisdom of Solomon, iii. 2, 3. — v. 15.

separation of the soul from the body. Formidable, I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness and strength of mind are peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a well-grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrours, not with calmness only, but with joy; raised by divine prospects and hopes, into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from Heaven is looked for by good men at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all the emergencies of their life divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them; but that, at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies, has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.* When *the rod and staff* of this

Shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving Spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts; till at length, when the moment arrives that *the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken*, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle, and places it in a better mansion.—How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honoured and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying till the last moment of reflection, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain! *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.**

After the view which we have taken of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment which should arise in our minds, is gratitude to Heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terrour of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholy silence of the grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horrour

* 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination! The happiest change which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character, and state! What light and cheerfulness is introduced into our abode! What eternal praise is due to Him, who, *according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven!*

The next effect which the subject we have considered should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those advantages which good men enjoy at their death. The road which leads to them is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is, by the appointment of Heaven, connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures, let us fear God, and keep his commandments; let us *hold faith and a good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world, if at the end he sinks into dejection and terrour, all his former honour is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety

may impose on the world; but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death. The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.**

The last instruction, which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be servilely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles to which the love of life should remain subordinate. Wherever religion, virtue, or true honour call him forth to danger, life ought to be hazarded without fear. There is a generous contempt of death, which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a Christian. His behaviour ought to shew the elevation of his soul above the present world; ought to discover the liberty which he possesses, of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those

* Psalm xxxvii. 37.

restraints and fetters which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to *return to its dust*, we may deliver up *the spirit to Him who gave it.*

SERMON XXIV.

On the Happiness of a Future State.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

Revelations, vii. 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

IN this mysterious book of Scripture many revolutions are foretold which were to take place in the church of God. They are not indeed so foretold as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan and final issue of the Divine Government. Amidst those distresses which befell Christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable; as they shewed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed, who foresaw

all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so overrule them as to promote in the end the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions with which the Apostle John was favoured; of seals opened in heaven; of trumpets sounding; and vials poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain for a while a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard *as the voice of many waters and of mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever.** Such is the prospect with which the Divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates, the many dark and direful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of Scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemed. *After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed than in contemplating what his love hath purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him.

* Rev. xix. 6.—xi. 15.

The sacrament of the Supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the text, taken in connection with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect which is here afforded us of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. WHAT the words of the text most obviously suggest is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented as sharing together the same felicity and honour. Without society, it is impossible for man to be happy. Place him in a region where he was surrounded with every pleasure; yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish. They are not merely our wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances that enter into all our connections! Sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive of much pleasure. The ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous intercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally

insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company, in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves, and the vexations which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissensions arise; and disagreement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connections where somewhat does not occur to disappoint our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing. We flatter ourselves with having found those who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspicions arise; and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name, without the pleasure, of friendship; and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select from the corrupted crowd a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There, are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just, who ever existed in the universe of God; without any distress to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle, no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent Spirits.

Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and, by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from and adds to the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities which adhere to the human character. Recall the most pleasing and tender moments which you ever enjoyed in their society; and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity* is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the Psalmist to such things as are most refreshing to the heart of man; to the fragrancy of the richest odours, and to the reviving influence of soft ethereal dews. *It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron; and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore.* *

Besides the felicity which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude who stand before the throne;* these are, access to the most exalted society, and renewal of the most tender connexions. The former is pointed out in the Scripture by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born; by sitting down with Abraham, and Issac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven* †; a promise which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows

* Psalm cxxxiij. 2. † Heb. xii. 22, 23. Matth. viii. 11.

good men to entertain the hope, that, separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd in the midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to mingle with prophets, patriarchs, and apostles, with legislators and heroes, with all those great and illustrious spirits who have shone in former ages as the servants of God, or the benefactors of men; whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate; whose steps we now follow at a distance; and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this high assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connexions with virtuous friends which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment which perhaps can fill it in this mortal state. For, of all the sorrows which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and, by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility. In these agonizing moments how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal; that there is a time to come, of re-union with those with whom our happiest days were spent; whose joys and sorrows once were ours; and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more! — Such is the society of the blessed above. Of such are the mul-

titude composed who *stand before the throne.* Let us now observe,

II. THAT this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called *a multitude, a great multitude, a great multitude which no man could number.* These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house,* said our Saviour, *there are many mansions.* That *city of the living God,* towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants; and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassable, nor untrodden. Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

It is much to be lamented, that, among all denominations of Christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed, of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of the Christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the genuine spirit of the Gospel? Can a Christian be-

lieve the effects of the sufferings of Christ to be no greater than these? For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and pour out his soul unto the death, that only a few, who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us, might be brought to the kingdom of heaven? Is this all *the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth? He was with child; he was in pain;* and shall he not *see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied?* Surely, the Scripture has given us full ground to conclude, that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The Captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed; He shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement let us observe,

III. That the heavenly society is represented in the text, as gathered out of all the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions, of *a multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues;* as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent and power of divine grace. They whom distant seas and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable, as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the Divine Spirit to those blissful habitations, from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life; from

the peopled city, and from the solitary desert; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity, and from the regions of science and improvement. *They shall come*, says our blessed Lord himself, *from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.* *

Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of divine goodness, and to remove those fears which are ready to arise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed who surround the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge; the feeble, whom divine grace had strengthened; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure, and the old who had borne the distress of age with undecayed constancy; many whom want could not tempt to dishonesty; many whom riches did not seduce into pride and impiety; many who in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances, in the midst of camps and armies, and corrupted courts, had preserved unsullied integrity. In a word, *from all kindreds and people*; that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among *publicans and sinners*, you would behold those whom divine assistance had conducted to future

* Luke, xiii. 29.

glory.—And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the Christian race, with this *cloud of witnesses* who have finished their course with success; animated, while we *fight the good fight*, with the shouts of those who have overcome and are crowned, shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith. *Be ye faithful unto the death; and ye shall receive the crown of life: Be ye strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: Be followers of us who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. The description given in the Text of the happiness and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the Apostle *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.* All that these *palms and white robes* import, it is not given us now to understand. We know that among all nations they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory; and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honour to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope better becomes us, than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt.

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract

particular attention: That the blessed are here described as *standing before the throne and before the Lamb;* that is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance at which we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories which we inhabit, are not His abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be *a God that hideth himself. He dwelleth,* as to us, *in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow and sin, and every evil thing, shall fly away before the brightness of his face. For neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space, over which his beams are spread, into a region of light; so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.* The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects: *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain: for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed*

them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us,

V. TURN our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the Text given in the sequel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which come out of great tribulation.** This explanatory circumstance may relate particularly to the case of those primitive sufferers who endured severe persecution in the cause of the gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits, keep us in constant agitation; while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans and oppress our spirits. Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chase of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For,

* Rev. vii. 13, 14.

besides the necessity of trouble, in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is with us, for most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time the current of all our wishes tends to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: And from this conflict between our wishes on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. There, *remaineth* at last *a rest for the people of God;* rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment; rest from all the sins and the sorrows of this miserable world; rest which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. Good men *shall rest from their labours and their works shall follow them.* They have *come out of great tribulation.* They have fulfilled, with honour, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down in the seat of the Conqueror; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered,

VI. One very material circumstance, descriptive both of the character, and of the happiness of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they*

come out of great tribulation, but, as the Spirit of God adds in explaining the Text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

First, their sanctity or purity is emblematically described, by their being clothed in *robes which are washed and made white*. In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change so great as to receive in Scripture the appellation of a *new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion, and all the operations of grace, contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consist not only the necessary preparations for future felicity, but which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For whence arises the misery of this present world? It is not owing to our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantages of this kind, a pure, a stedfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices, and misplaced desires, are the instruments of the torment which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in vain against us.

* Rev. vii. 14.

These are the *vials of wrath* which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth, and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of woe. Thence discontent and remorse gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery; and man is transformed into a savage to man.

But suppose sin to be banished from the world; suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from Heaven, and to animate every human breast; and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age, which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of ancient prophecy; *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose.* —— If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth*, and those *new heavens*, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue, that hinders us from conceiving fully the

influence of righteousness upon happiness. The *robes* in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the Text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, when these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them, of which we can, as yet, form no conception.

But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb;* leading our thoughts to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace and then in glory. From that blood which was *shed for the remission of sins,* flow both the atonement of human guilt, and the regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence as to mingle with angels. We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed *to open for us a new and living way within the veil.* The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human race, will tend highly to increase the felicity of the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding re-

turns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

From those views of a state of future happiness which the Text has suggested, various instructions relating to life and practice naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another; and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principal articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence; and he who seeks his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

We are farther taught whence to derive constancy and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft, and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocency.* Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look up to that happy *multitude who have come out*

of great tribulation, and now stand before the throne. Until the day arrive which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before us, by supporting, with a constant mind, the trials of our fidelity. *Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

From the prospects which the Text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect.* I mean not that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where undoubtedly lies the chief scene of human action, of human duty. But while we act as inhabitants of the earth, we ought at the same time so to remember our connection with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments deject us; but with an equal spirit, with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally, let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ; to the eternal Father, who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous; and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the Dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great Restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are at this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death

is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all the obligations which we lie under to this great benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*— Whom, O blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable of forgetting Thee? Thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour; our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged our views beyond these territories of disorders and darkness. Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God.* Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem;* and leadest us into the *path of life.* Thou from age to age gatherest *out of every nation, and kindred, and people, that multitude which stand before the throne.* Thou bringest them *out of great tribulation.* Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested; thine, *the palms* which they bear; and by Thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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